

A
MASQUERADE



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A MASQUERADE R.

VOL. II.

A MASQUERADE R

BY

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'A MOORLAND IDYL,' 'A VILLAGE HAMPDEN,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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A MASQUERADE R.

CHAPTER I.

THE BONNIE RED HACKLE.

THE water was in ‘amazing case’ (so Mr. Crook, at least, repeatedly averred, and he was no mean authority upon topics of this nature) and all members of the party appeared to be in correspondingly amazing spirits. The ‘wimplin’ burn’ and the invigorating mountain breezes had communicated the sparkling secret of their existence to this handful of mere mortals,

showing them how, for a space, to fling away the burden of consciousness, and to rise with them unshackled to the ethereal realm of an ecstatic present.

All were jubilant, but the little clergyman seemed the heart and soul of all. He had not come forth under the slightest misconception. Some of them may have fancied that they had come here to fish, but Mr. Crook was not of the number. Angling, such as he understood it, formed no part whatever of the day's duties ; upon that score his mind was perfectly at rest. Angling to Mr. Crook was like whist to the memorable Sarah Battle. It did not admit of any such irreverent attitude as 'having no objection to take a hand,' 'no pleasure in —— catching,' 'liking to catch one fish and lose another.' Mr. Crook was none of that breed. For one thing, he

was perfectly well aware that trout are quite infallible in their perception of such insufferable triflers, and will not allow themselves to be inveigled into any kind of intercourse with them. That alone were sufficient to determine the attitude of any reasonable creature.

The vicar of High Feldom had come forth to enjoy himself, and to act his part strenuously in contributing to the enjoyment of others. In this he promised to be remarkably successful. In so far as there was to be any trifling with the rod, he had naturally attached himself as instructor to Miss Margaret Whinstone, relegating Miss Langtoft to the heretical mercies of Mr. Paul. But now, whilst they were all together; he was instilling his pet doctrines into the general company, actually clinching the main point of his argument with a

stanza of a local song, which he chanted with remarkable spirit, and for which he received universal applause.

“ “The black-flee is gude when it’s airly ;
The May-flee is deadly in spring ;
The midge-flee may do in fair weather ;
For foul, sawmon-roe is the king :
But let it be late or be early,
The water be drumly or sma’,
Still up wi’ the bonnie red hackle—
The hackle that tackled them a’!”

‘ Now, Paul,’ he exclaimed, with a flourish of his arm, as he repeated the refrain,

“ “Still up wi’ the bonnie red hackle—
The hackle that tackled them a’!”

Paul was not so prejudiced as to decline the appeal, consequently his voice joined readily with the vicar’s, and all was closed with an outburst of ringing laughter which floated away on the breeze.

'Now, let us take counsel together,' continued the clergyman, arranging his friends before him. 'Here we must begin.'

They had reached a point where the valley divided like a Y, at the meeting of two waters. The hills were steep all around them, but to the left the vale was moderately wide and peaceful, to the right it narrowed to a rugged pass; this latter was the Braidstruther Burn. A primitive stone arch spanned the water here at the mouth, and just beside it was a storm-blasted ash-tree, but a few twigs of which had succeeded in putting forth their leaves. By this they all stood.

'It is half-past nine now,' continued Mr. Crook, with his watch in his hand. 'We shall reach the Linn by eleven. Shall we halt there for further parley?'

'—And refreshments?' said Paul.

'No coarse details, Paul, please. Parley includes—whatever you intend it to include. I leave that with you.'

'When do we reach Braidstruther?' asked Clare.

'Not before two, I should say.'

'Then I think eleven would be a good dividing point, Mr. Crook. Do you not think so, Miss Whinstone?'

'Oh, certainly. Anywhere for me. It is all so divine that I shall forget all about eating.'

'You will make an angler, Miss Whinstone, I see,' remarked the clergyman, approvingly. 'Then, Paul, if Miss Langtoft is ready, be so good as to proceed.'

'Oh, are we to go first?' cried Clare.

'It will be as well,' replied Mr. Crook, with a smile, 'for, if you don't, there will be nothing left for you to proceed for.'

'Ho, ho!' cried Paul. 'You are modest. Give us ten minutes' start.'

'Very good;' and off they went up the burn-side.

Whilst the vicar and his companion stood awaiting their turn, the former expatiated upon the picturesque surroundings. It was an exquisite morning,—too exquisite to last, Mr. Crook had in himself resolved; without, of course, giving utterance to such disquieting suspicion,—and all the country sparkled in the sunlight. It was as clear and fresh as a morning in April, with compact bits of clouds flecking the blue, and their flitting shadows flecking also the wide expanse of moorland beneath. There was a cuckoo audible up the valley, and ecstatic sky-larks innumerable. Sheep and lambs were dotted about the bare slopes far and near,

and their voices from time to time mingled with the other sounds which served to emphasize the mountain stillness.

‘And the water constantly,’ continued the poetical clergyman, with enthusiasm. ‘Isn’t it exquisite? No such music in the universe as its “toddlin’ din.” You see how the drop of rain yesterday has tinted it. Just look at it sweeping thinly over that stone in the middle there,—just like a glazing of amber, isn’t it? But, hush! See the “trooties.” You can’t? Watch —there, look, like darting shadows. Can’t you?’

‘Oh, yes, I see,’ whispered Margaret, under her breath.

Mr. Crook stepped forward a few paces, giving a sign to his companion to remain behind him. He threw in his line against the current, and the circles spread out-

wards as the fly dexterously alighted upon the surface of the water. Before the young lady could well perceive what had happened, there was a suppressed guffaw from the clergyman, and a fish was dangling in the air.

In breach of all angling propriety, Margaret uttered a little scream of delight and grasped at the object.

‘Oh, how easy it is, Mr. Crook! I thought it required a great deal of learning. Paul is such a teaze.’

‘As easy as can be. Try, Miss Whinstone.’

She did try, and continued to try; then blushed, and continued to blush, for fully ten minutes, without any result except upon her own temper.

‘That’s the only one in the stream, Mr. Crook,’ she said, with a pout.

The clergyman laughed good-naturedly. ‘Let us see;’ and, with the rod in his hand, he stepped a few yards further up the stream to a small patch of promising water. There was a graceful sweep of the line, and silence. In a moment it was raised again, but only to be re-thrown. This time almost as the fly touched the water it was seized, and Mr. Crook raised a triumphant chuckle.

‘Then they know you,’ cried Margaret, with comical chagrin.

‘I think they do, Miss Whinstone.’

After this they walked leisurely onwards.

‘Have patience,’ Mr. Crook said, as they proceeded, ‘I know a pool where you cannot fail to take one.’

Then again he directed her attention to all the objects around them. Now it was a decayed alder trunk fantastically grown,

covered with moss and lichen, and in the crannies a polypody fern, a bit of wood sorrel, or a primrose tuft: now a little fairy grotto in the bank, formed under an overhanging ledge of delicate herbage matted in the roots of a tree and saturated with moisture, from the front of which the water dripped down long chains of moss of inexpressible green, which hung like curtains before the sacred interior. This natural screen Mr. Crook would tenderly part with his fingers, and bid Margaret peep within. The sun, not a whit less curious, would peep with her, and marvellous was the revelation.

‘It is the pixies’ drawing-room,’ remarked the vicar; ‘they prefer it damp.’

There was displayed a little chamber of some three feet square, upholstered in nature’s daintiest green. The carpet was

of moss, and the festooned hangings of rootlets also covered with moss. In amongst it were a few favoured plants, such as ferns, wood sorrel, golden saxifrage, and foxglove seedlings, all reduced to fitting fairy proportions, and all exhaling a delicious earthy fragrance suggestive of fairy-rings and moonlight.

Over all these things would Mr. Crook grow ecstatic, none the less so that he was not sure of the sympathy of his companion. If, however, she did not enjoy such sights quite so much as her exclamation would attempt to imply, she ought to, that was all, and a clergyman must do his duty.

Whilst the pair behind were engaged in this way, Paul and his companion were not a whit less busy. They had disappeared in the pass in front, being swallowed up by the rocks which from a distance

appeared to bar the passage. At that corner the grassy alder-grown margin ceased, and the hills closed in literally to no more than the width of the water. Upon each side they rose precipitous to a height of some two hundred feet. On the left were solid crags, with small grassy terraces amongst them, from which the sheep looked down with curiosity : on the right, the side where Clare and Paul were walking, the whole slope was a mass of ‘glidders,’ as a certain geological formation is locally called. It had the appearance of a gigantic heap of stones broken upon Macadam’s principles ; formidably sullen in aspect, especially so as they were now on the shaded side of the valley, seeming ready at any instant to slide down the incline in a body, and overwhelm everything that might be below. Its

grim uniformity seemed hardly broken by the couple of stunted thorn-trees which had secured a foothold near the summit; the foot or two of coarse grass and braken beneath a jagged rock jutting out from the glidders a little lower down; the bright green tufts of parsley fern which emerged here and there from the surface.

Shepherd's feet had formed a kind of track by the water-side; but at best it was only a rough one, as, naturally, all the largest and heaviest boulders had rolled down here to the bottom. Paul had been blessing this rugged pathway ever since he started, and it did not disappoint him. He kept a jealous eye on his companion, who, although keenly enjoying the scramble, was by no means above accepting his polite attentions. Indeed, in many places they were indispensable, and the young

gentleman showed a sharp eye for increasing their number.

Clare was as free-spirited as the mountain sheep, and not troubled with much of the stiffness essential to true maidenly propriety ; hence unwittingly she fed profusely the sentimental hunger under which her companion suffered. In such wild mood as this she really liked Paul Whinstone, for he was so admirably adapted to the situation. He never appeared ridiculous, as it is just possible that he might under conditions of a less natural kind : he was equal to every emergency. If the stream had to be leaped, he would leap it, with grace and ease : if a trout had to be caught, he could catch it with almost equal certainty : if a young lady had to be lifted across a patch of saturated bog, he could do it perhaps most gracefully of

all. Yes, and Clare would let him do it, so prettily did he urge the request.

A few fish Paul took, but he was loth to keep up too seriously the farce. Angling conditions were not such as to-day he could patiently endure. He longed to live in the music of her voice, and not in the music of the water. Clare, of course, noticed his fluttering propensities, but as yet thought nothing whatever about them. Naturally enough he enjoyed it, as she herself undoubtedly did. That her neighbour could fall seriously in love with her was a thought which could at no moment have occurred to her, owing to the position which Paul occupied in her mind. For one thing, she would not have been guilty of such vanity as to suppose that she embodied an ideal capable of offering attractions to one of Mr. Whinstone's

temperament. But, as I say, cogitation upon any such lines was precluded once and for all by the patronising altitude from which the young lady regarded him.

Time is apt to be curt with us under such favourable conditions, and it was of course with a sense of bitterest chagrin that Paul sighted the point where they were to re-assemble.

‘Oh, there is the Linn !’ he cried ; there was much in the tone.

‘What a calamity, Mr. Whinstone ! I believe you are ashamed of your creel.’

‘ You should credit me with a nobler sentiment, Miss Langtoft. The thing has never once crossed my mind on the whole of the journey. Do think better of me ! ’

‘There is no limit to my estimate of you, I do assure you. No lady of ro-

mance ever had a more accomplished knight than I have had this morning.'

The turn delighted Paul, but he was never quite certain of her.

'I wish I could feel that you really meant it, for then I should consider it the highest compliment that I have ever received in my life. But you make fun of me, Miss Langtoft; I know you do.'

'It is quite a revelation to find that you are so super-sensitive, Mr. Whinstone. The other day you accused me of the some enormity. I assure you it is undeserved. State your grounds.'

'I can't analyze. I jump at conclusions that I am prompted to jump at, and for some reason this is one. I suppose it is because I know my inferiority, and have a suspicion that you ought to make fun of me.'

‘You go from bad to worse. This is positively morbid. Pray banish such sensitiveness, or you will make me quite uncomfortable. I can assure you I have felt, to-day, very keenly my inferiority in the scale of creation, and, but for your undoubted superiority, I should have been bog-trotting knee-deep, and most likely have incurred grave bodily disablement into the bargain. What more can I say?’

‘Oh, nothing at all, thank you. I am quite at my ease.’

‘I never feel that this is properly called a linn, Mr. Whinstone,’ Clare went on, pointing to the water before them. ‘This is what I call a cascade, and—I may very likely be talking nonsense—but the words do not appear to me synonymous. A linn I always picture as a more distinct fall.

This is dragged out too much with its three or four distinct plunges.'

'Yes, I see what you mean, and I think you are quite right, Miss Langtoft.'

Of course he did; but he reserved an admission that he thought nothing whatever about it. Clare possibly discovered the reservation, for she dropped the subject and gazed for a minute or two at the water silently.

There was nothing magnificent about it, for it was only one of the numberless little mountain falls, too small for any general reputation; but for one, like this young lady, who cared for such things for their own intrinsic interest, it offered as great attractions as the mammoth Niagara itself.

The burn had about twenty feet to fall, and it took about as many yards to do it in. There were four zig-zag leaps amidst

the rocks ; in accomplishing which the water was transformed to a torrent of amber and white foam—and then the deep pool below, on one side of which the current rushed impetuously on, whilst the rest of the surface was covered with an eddying sheet of purest snow.

‘Now, Mr. Whinstone, we must get ready for them,’ said Clare, turning to him abruptly, and disturbing his quiet scrutiny of her features. ‘Let us cut a heap of heather to sit on, for the ground here is distinctly damp. You cut and I’ll carry. Come.’

Clare led the way up the bank, and, in a minute or two, they were busy enough. It did not take them long to accumulate a goodly pile, and, when they had arranged it, they sat down to await their companions.

'How many?' cried Mr. Crook, in his accustomed cheery tone.

'Oh, I don't know. About half-a-dozen.'

The clergyman laughed immoderately.

'Mr. Whinstone has been too polite for sport,' remarked Clare, apologetically.

'Have you done so much better?'

'A round score.'

'And I caught three,' cried Margaret.

'Have you caught any, Miss Langtoft?'

'Only one.'

'Oh, you lazy people! Whatever have you been doing?'

Margaret looked at her brother significantly as she put the question.

'You, sir, give an account of yourself? Have you been botanizing?'

'Of course I have. Behold my specimens,' said Paul, opening his hand towards

the heap of heather beside him. ‘Try them, Madge, and thank us for our labours. Rheumatic fever inevitably awaited you but for our scientific propensities.’

‘That’s a good excuse.’

‘As we couldn’t attempt variety of species we went in for quantity.’

‘A cloak for gross ignorance, Paul,’ interposed the vicar. ‘Here’s variety without end. I’ll have you a score in two minutes.’

‘Ho, ho ! A score ! I challenge you—barring moss and lichen.’

‘You do ? Then attend,’ said the clergyman, looking around him, ‘and I will point and you count. There’s woodruff, star saxifrage, butterwort, daisy, buttercup, lady’s-smock, colts’-foot, dog-violet, hawk-weed, wood geranium, harebell—there, not in flower—wild thyme, the like,

primrose, dandelion, golden saxifrage, St. John's wort, lady's-mantle. Now, come, how many is that ?'

' Only seventeen,' cried Paul, in triumph, holding up his fingers.

' Certainly, Paul. I have not begun yet.' And again the little man's finger darted hither and thither as every fresh species was named. The young ladies looked on with laughing interest. ' Dwarf valerian, wood sorrel, wall cress, milkwort blue and white, tormentil, heath, ling, blaeberry——'

' Hold, hold, I yield !'

' Rowan, dwarf willow, sloe, bog-myrtle, bugle, tuberous vetch, crawtoes——'

' Mercy, I retreat ! I didn't know the whole moor contained so many.'

The clergyman added his laugh to the general chorus, and at once produced a corkscrew.

‘There are only a few sandwiches, biscuits, and sherry,’ said Paul, in reply to this obvious suggestion. ‘I told David to go on to Braidstruther——’

‘Certainly, what can mortal want more? I am sure that my two fair, brave anglers do not.’

Paul’s satchel was turned out, and they fell to.

‘Now, Paul, I have given you a botanical disquisition; it is your turn to entertain the company. Let us have, say—an appropriate ballad.’

The vicar looked mischievously at his young friend, expecting an awkward apology. His surprise was great when, instead, Paul turned calmly to him and said,

‘Very good. What shall it be—sentimental or historical?’

Still, he took it for a joke, and just said,

‘ Oh, we’ll leave that to you.’

‘ Historical, if I may choose,’ said Clare.

‘ “ Kinmont Willie ” ?’

‘ Capitally,’ assented Clare.

The vicar stared, for Paul showed no jocose twinkle. How long was the joke to be sustained? To his own knowledge Whinstone did not know a verse of the thing; had persistently declined to know it. Curiosity rapidly advanced to amazement as Paul began; literally began to recite the verses.

‘ Oh, have ye na heard of the fause Sakelde ?

Oh, have ye na heard of the keen Lord Scroope ?

How they hae ta’en bauld Kinmont Willie,

On Haribee to hang him up ?’

Mr. Crook’s features afforded such a ludicrous study that after the second

stanza Paul was overwhelmed with laughter ; but he quickly recovered himself, and went on as before. He delivered the words with spirit, showing a just appreciation of the spirit of the minstrel. The ruffian's capture, and his incarceration in 'Carlisle Castell,' were narrated, and the Buccleuch's terrible anger at the news.

' He has ta'en the table with his hand,
He gar'd the red wine spring on hie :
" Now Christ's curse on my head," he said,
" But avenged of Lord Scroope I'll be !

" " Oh, is my basnet a widow's curch ?
Or my lance a wand of the willow-tree ?
Or my arm a ladye's lily hand,
That an English lord should lightly me ?

• • • • •
" " But since nae war's between the lands,
And there is peace, and peace should be,
I'll harm neither English lad nor lass,
And yet the Kinmont freed shall be ! " "

'Bravo !' cried Mr. Crook, under his breath, with irresistible enthusiasm. The

ladies also testified their approval and interest.

Then the summoning of the ‘forty Marchmen bauld,’ and their spirited tramp across the ‘Bateable land.

‘ There were five and five before them all,
With hunting-horns and bugles bright ;
And five and five came with Buccleuch,
Like Warden’s men, arrayed for fight.

‘ And five and five, like a mason gang,
That carried the ladders lang and hie ;
And five and five, like broken men ;
And so they reach’d the Woodhouselee.’

The very first of men that they met with was none other than the fause Sakelde himself, to whose treachery the imprisonment of Kinmont was due. He challenges each company as they come up to him, and each gives a characteristic answer, putting the vicar of High Feldom into transports thereby. At last,

“ ‘Where are ye gaun, ye mason lads,
With all your ladders, lang and hie?’”

“ ‘We gang to herry a corbie’s nest,
That wons not far frae Woodhouselee.’”

“ ‘Where be ye gaun, ye broken men?’”
Quo’ fause Sakelde ; “ come, tell to me !”
Now Dicky of Dryhope led that band,
And never a word oflear had he.

“ ‘Why trespass ye on the English side?
Row-footed outlaws, stand !’ quo’ he ;
The never a word had Dicky to say,
Sae he thrust the lance through his fause bodie.’

Then, as they advance over the obscure
wastes of the borderland, the wind began
full loud to blow.

‘ But ’twas wind and weet, and fire and sleet,
When we came beneath the castle wa’.’

Stealthily they scale the walls and gain
entrance to the fortress. Before achieving
their purpose, they raise the inmates by a
defiant trumpet-blast, ‘ O wha dare meddle
wi’ me ?’ and then in the excitement set
to work.

‘With coulters, and with forehammers,
We gar’d the bars bang merrilie,
Until we came to the inner prison,
Where Willie o’ Kinmont he did lie.’

He is speedily taken up on the shoulders of the Red Rowan, ‘the starest man in Teviotdale,’ and the whole company again scale down the walls amidst the intensest excitement. All Carlisle bells are rung, and a thousand men on horse and foot set off in hot pursuit. Buc-cleuch’s band turned to the Eden water, ‘even where it flowed frae bank to brim,’ and, without the slightest hesitation, plunge in, man and horse, and reach safely the opposite bank, whence an insulting glove is thrown to the pursuers.

‘If ye like na my visit in merry England,
In fair Scotland come visit me.’

Lord Scroope stands all sore astonished,

consoling himself with such reflections as naturally occur to one discomfited, as he turns to go homewards. No mere mortal could thus have served him.

“ ‘He is either himsel’ a devil frae hell,
Or else his mother a witch maun be:
I wou’dna have ridden that wan water
For all the gowd in Christentie.’”

Paul ceased, and the vicar was ecstatic. He leaped from his seat of heather and embraced Paul; that is, he seized his hand and wrung it most unmercifully. No minstrel ever recited it more effectively, nor to a fairer audience.

‘A thousand apologies, my dear Paul; but, frankly, I don’t know the meaning of it. You are an impostor.’

‘He is not so hopeless as you have imagined, Mr. Crook,’ cried Clare. ‘You could not have rendered it better yourself.’

'Better! Not half so well, my dear Miss Langtoft. The man is saved.'

Much similar fun was made out of the surprising incident, and, although Miss Langtoft joined heartily in it, she was not so easy as a quarter-of-an-hour before. Irresistibly, the impossible thought had been thrust upon her, rendered by no means any longer impossible. Numberless little unheeded incidents of the morning now recurred to her, and assumed altogether a fresh significance. Paul's previous attitude to this minstrelsy was notorious; how genuinely so was obvious from Mr. Crook's reception of this change in it. Furthermore, it was distinctly in Clare's recollection that in the most innocent fun she had recommended this particular ballad to Paul's attention. Had any other construction seemed reasonable, the young

gentleman's behaviour whilst reciting it precluded entirely such possibility. Too pointedly, as Clare under this revelation discovered, he had recited his ballad *to her*.

Of course, the situation was as yet merely amusing; nevertheless, it required to be grappled with at once. Upon such topics Clare was apt to be more serious than most people; probably because, instead of minimising, she exaggerated the feelings of others. This rendered it impossible for her to trifle with anybody. The chronic, affected sentimentalism of the youthful world in general was an abomination to her, and not for two minutes tolerated in her own intercourse with anybody. In all probability it had been the unconscious perception of this very characteristic that had made Paul always feel rather afraid of her. He could

not reduce her altogether to his own plain.

But Miss Langtoft was not deficient in resources. She could form resolutions and carry them out, without betraying the effect of them too conspicuously to the one concerned. To this treatment henceforth must Mr. Whinstone be subjected.

From one topic they drifted on to another, until presently Mr Crook was seen to be standing with his sketch-book in hand, and his eyes glancing critically at Miss Margaret Whinstone. That young lady was doing her best to repress the habitual giggle, and with moderate success. Paul had his watch in his hand, and his eyes fixed upon it. Soon he cried ‘Up!’ and the sketch was held out for general inspection.

‘Very good!’ ‘Excellent!’ came from

the beholders at sight of the recognisable outline.

'It is too good for me, Mr. Crook,' said Margaret, with exemplary modesty. 'But now try Miss Langtoft.'

It had been a playful bargain, so Clare gracefully presented herself for the sitting. The clergyman drew his lines boldly in this case, and with such precision of effect as to suggest that the details had received some previous consideration from him. Clare's face was one to impress anybody endowed with the smallest artistic perception, and Mr. Crook might reasonably have claimed rather more than this. He considered that he had penetrated some little way beneath the mere pleasing exterior of the features, and he endeavoured in this rapidly-executed outline to display something of the spiritual

expression that he had discerned there. But the time was up, and the pencil vigorously stayed.

'Oh, how can you do it, Mr. Crook?' cried Margaret, as they examined the drawing. 'I wish I could. Is it more difficult than catching trout?'

'Not to me.'

Clare had smiled, certainly without the remotest supercilious intention, but Margaret, with a flash of uneasy self-consciousness, was silent.

'Yes, it is beautiful,' muttered Paul; but whether he referred to the workmanship or the expression of the features nobody cared to inquire. His sister knew, at any rate, that he had passed no such comment upon the former sketch, and she was confirmed in her abandonment to silence.

The observant clergyman was as ever to the rescue, and, clapping the book instantly in his pocket, discovered that they were wasting a great deal of time, and, what was perhaps rather more to the point, that the sky had become ominously overclouded. It caused no manner of surprise to him; but the fact had been entirely unnoticed of the others. It brought all briskly to their feet.

'But you don't say it is going to rain?' asked Miss Whinstone, looking about her with alarm.

'No, I don't say so,' replied the vicar; 'but it is,' he added, in an aside to Paul.

'We seem to be pretty well agreed about the angling,' said Miss Langtoft, as they prepared to move onwards. 'Let us be sociable and keep up the farce no

longer. I am sure the gentlemen are longing for a cigar together; so come, Miss Whinstone, let us show them the way.'

Paul had not the faintest inclination for smoking, and Mr. Crook never did so on any account before dinner; but Clare was not to be so easily thwarted. She had taken Margaret by the arm and had already left the two others to follow. They were bound, therefore, for the moment to acquiesce, and Paul philosophically took a cigarette from his pocket.

The burn very soon emerged from the narrow defile in which it had been hidden, and an expanse of undulating moorland became visible upon either hand. The path was much smoother than heretofore, and far ahead in the open appeared the house which marked the destination of the wanderers, and to which the crease

marking the bed of the stream lay like a road over the intervening waste.

'Paul, you are a gross dissembler,' the vicar began when they were alone. 'What is the meaning of it?'

'Is she not very beautiful, Mr. Crook?'

'Undoubtedly she is, and of a miraculous influence if she can lead you to learn a ballad.'

The young man blew the smoke from his lips and laughed.

'Give me that sketch from your book, will you? It is really an admirable likeness.'

'Pooh, pooh! It is not worthy of the name of likeness. I shall destroy it.'

'You won't, Mr. Crook, I can assure you. Now do give me it. I ask it as a favour. I want to keep it in remembrance of this morning.'

‘ My dear Paul,’ replied the vicar, with kindly gravity, ‘ do you know to what all this is tending?’

‘ I do. I love Miss Langtoft as I can love nobody else in the universe. You will give me it?’

‘ I will, and may God’s blessing be with it.’

The clergyman took the book from his pocket, and tore out the leaf coveted by his companion. Paul gazed at it before putting it away, and then turned the conversation into quite a different channel.

All the sparkling splendour of two or three hours ago had vanished; sombre clouds had arisen from the south-west and overspread the sky, hiding all but one insignificant rift of blue in the zenith. Mr. Crook, who was infallible as a weather prophet, began to get very uneasy; for (as

he cynically put it) the ladies had with characteristic prudence come prepared for nothing but a world of sunshine, as if sunshine was inseparable even from them. For some distance he grumbled intermittently about it, until at length a spot of rain upon his cheek aroused him to more definite action.

‘When it begins, it will rain for the rest of the day. Come, Paul, we must join them, and hasten our steps.’

They did immediately as he proposed, and before they reached Braidstruther his fears were fully justified.

CHAPTER II.

OF VARIOUS COURSES.

THE rain was turned into an additional source of amusement : all the more readily so as the company reached the house before it had assumed any really inconvenient proportions. Maisie Winlaw was busy there, assisted by the man whom Paul had dispatched forward in charge of the commissariat ; but Hugh was absent, engaged no doubt upon his pastoral duties on the moor.

When the young ladies had been de-

livered into the hands of their hostess, and, at Mr. Crook's suggestion, the manservant sent home, Paul and the vicar made a general review of the situation. They were seated before the fire—a bright coal fire, kindled in their honour—in the parlour. It was, in fact, the room in which Hugh had indulged his formative reverie but a few days ago, and from which he had passed out to the impressive scene in the dawn. The room afforded evidence in its various substantial appointments of the goodly yeoman extraction of the inhabitants. A dark oak dresser was on one side, with old-fashioned brass handles on the drawers below, and quaint diamond panes in the glass front to the cupboard above. This latter contained books, in addition to those which lay upon the table and those upon a sideboard by

another wall. There were some silhouettes over the mantel-piece, three parts frame; and two enlarged coloured photographs, presumably portraits of the parents of the present possessors. Elsewhere on the walls were framed prints of the best-known portraits of Sir Walter Scott and Burns; a large coloured print of Falco Peregrinus, the Peregrine Falcon; and a pair of water-colours in gilt frames representing respectively the homestead of Southernknowe, the late house of the Winlaws, and another part of the glen in its immediate vicinity.

On the sideboard before referred to were some objects of interest in addition to the books. In the centre was a glass case some two feet or more square, flanked upon one side by a curlew stuffed, and upon the other by a heron in similar con-

dition. This central case contained what was evidently intended for a miniature bit of moorland scenery in the form of a model, constructed of the genuine material peculiar to the locality, and in its details displaying quite an artistic perception of perspective and relative proportion. Up above were the barren, undulating ridges, with a fir plantation visible on a distant slope, and the foreground dipped to an exquisite ferny glen, through which a noisy burn tumbled amidst rocks and shingle.

After sitting for some time, Paul rose from his chair to have a look round at these miscellaneous contents of the room. He glanced first at the books in the cupboard, reading out a few of their titles.

‘I say, Hugh is quite a student, Mr.

Crook. I didn't know he had half so many books. Here's Green's History, and Hallam. Bless us ! old Carlyle's "French Revolution." I can't read that fellow for the life of me. Chambers' Encyclopædia, "Book of Days," and the whole lot of the Waverley novels up at the top there. Do you think he's read them all ?'

'I have little doubt of it,' replied the vicar.

'I wish I could say the same. But, hang it ! I must do a bit more in that line,' continued Paul, as he turned now to the table and took up one of the volumes lying there. 'Morley's "Sketch of English Literature,"' he said, idly running the pages over by their edges. 'Capital book, no doubt. H'm !'

The indifferent attitude had suddenly vanished, and Paul examined a page of

the book with scholarly interest. He did not say anything, nor was Mr. Crook regarding him, as that gentleman was engaged in building castles of his own in the fire-gleeds. If, however, he had looked over Paul's shoulder, he would have seen that it was nothing deeper than the flyleaf that was interesting him. Paul was, he might reasonably have concluded, quite incorrigible in this matter of books. But the page was not quite bare. What is it? Something ridiculous, no doubt; foreign enough to the gravity of literature, one may be certain. Some annotation, apparently, of the owner, for it is in MS. Seen more closely, it proved to be something more trivial still. At the top, scribbled in pencil, were the words, 'To Hugh Winlaw, with all good wishes.—C. L.'

It was this alone that had excited so great interest in the observer, and upon which his eyes had, for a whole minute, been riveted in silent examination. The scrutiny might have been prolonged indefinitely, had not the young man's continued and unnatural silence aroused his companion.

'Something interesting, Paul?' said Mr. Crook, looking up from the fire.

'Oh, no,' was the reply, as the book was closed. 'It is only Morley's Literature. Good book, I expect, but so beastly suggestive of exams. That settles a book for me.'

The vicar laughed.

'A poor compliment to our methods of instruction, I fear.'

Paul continued his survey, now standing before the model on the side-board.

'Isn't this awfully good? The fellow can do anything he puts his hand to.'

'Except make money, apparently,' interposed the vicar.

'He can do that, if he likes. He has no business to stay here. It's enough to drive a man frantic to live on these moors all the year round.'

'Not very stimulating to the practical powers, I should think, certainly.'

There were footsteps outside, and the door opened.

'Look here, Margaret,' cried Paul, as the ladies entered, 'isn't this good? You've seen it, Miss Langtoft?'

'Oh, yes. It is really very cleverly done. I have never seen it with the water in. Hugh will do it for us presently.'

'Yes, Hugh made it when he was quite

a boy,' Paul continued to his sister. ' He has got on to more serious subjects since,' he added, half turning towards the other lady, who, however, seemed not to hear the remark.

Indeed, Clare was just on the point of stepping across to Maisie, who was detained in conversation by the clergyman.

' I have just been telling Miss Winlaw, Mr. Crook, that we've not come here to be waited upon and made all manner of fuss of. We've come for a picnic, haven't we? and we'll set off this minute in the rain if she declines to accept us on this footing.'

' My very words, Miss Langtoft,' declared the vicar, in his accustomed spirit of vivacity. ' For my part,' he proceeded, in a lower tone, ' I myself insist upon frying our trout. I have a special method, which nobody in the universe can come

near to. Do give me your support in this, for Maisie promises to be cantankerous.'

'Certainly I will ; but on condition that I may be allowed to help you.'

'That is a compact. We will make them stare. Ha, here is Hugh !'

The shepherd entered the room at that instant, and, despite his strong talent for composure under the most extraordinary circumstances, there was a betrayal of some small measure of bashfulness in his demeanour upon the present occasion. There was nothing in the remotest degree boorish either in appearance or behaviour. He had just descended from his toilet, and was dressed in 'civil suited' grey—of a cut scarcely suggesting local sartorial talent. All present were welcomed gracefully—to the ladies he bowed; the two gentlemen gave him their hand; and there did not

appear anything incongruous in his acting the host even to such a distinguished company as this. The unfortunate turn in the weather was duly enlarged upon, and then attention was drawn to the model in which all had shown quite a childish interest. By an ingenious contrivance, Hugh had so constructed it that real water could be allowed to run down the miniature burn, making all sorts of little pools and cascades, just as in the living current. By universal request, Hugh was persuaded to put this contrivance into action, and he at once set about the necessary preparations.

Amidst the movements which attended it, Maisie, the vicar, and Clare withdrew, one by one, from the room, as Paul observed from the corners of his eyes. In the kitchen, as offering the most convenient area, the long table had been spread,

and, although there was nothing extraordinarily lavish, it may be presumed that such a display was unique in the records of the Braidstruther establishment. For the sake of simplifying arrangements, Paul had been allowed to undertake the duties of caterer to the expedition, and, seeing his recently-developed interest in a particular portion of the company, it may be imagined that he had not erred on the side of abstemiousness. The chickens had been provided by Maisie, as well as sundry other more substantial attributes of the feast. In addition there was, of course, the indispensable tongue and ham, daintily garnished; a shoulder of lamb, attended by the delicate fragrance of what even the unfleshly Bunyan knew as ‘the accustomed sauce belonging thereto;’ a tempting pie of the richest brown hue, contents

presumably pigeon; plates of crisp, ravishing salad, of fruits, biscuits, sweets, and other minor details which it were needless to enuinerate. On a side table were some bottles of wine and mineral waters.

'Oh, I call this a delusion and a snare; don't you, Mr. Crook?' exclaimed Miss Langtoft, with genuine disappointment at the appetising sight before her. 'I thought we were to come and cook our own trout, to be followed perhaps by a cold chicken and a bit of cheese. Why, this is more like a state luncheon. It is disappointing.'

'Oh, don't be troubled, Miss Langtoft,' said the vicar. 'We shall survive it.'

Mr. Crook, it may be remembered, was a bachelor, and lived under the dispensation of a housekeeper—facts which may just possibly have had some little to do with his depraved philosophy of submis-

sion to an infliction of such a sensual nature.

'But now let us to work. We shall surely survive it.'

The clergyman suited his action to the word, and, without ceremony, divested himself of his jacket and rolled his cuffs up to his elbows. Even the reticent Maisie was overcome by this, and joined her unrestrained laughter to that of her companion, Clare. When Mr. Crook was enveloped in an ample white apron, which he had insisted upon being supplied with, Clare pronounced him the beau-ideal of a bishop, and submitted herself unreservedly to his pastoral directions. She quite loved the little man with his vein of peremptoriness and never-failing geniality and good-humour.

It was not many minutes before there

was a hissing in the frying-pan, and a fragrant steam curling around the head of the transformed clergyman, and pervading the atmosphere of the dwelling. When Mr. Crook was thus fairly at work, Clare ran off to the parlour to take a part also in the entertainment which was there proceeding.

Hugh's contrivance was in full play, much to the interest of one at least of the beholders. Paul's attitude was not altogether so apparent as that of his sister. But he too brightened up at Clare's appearance.

'We thought you were going to play some trick upon us,' he said, as he made room for her to come forward before him.
'Whatever are you all up to?'

'Nothing,' laughed Clare. 'Mr. Crook will be here in a moment. Oh, isn't this

capital? Really, Hugh, you are a genius,' she said, throwing a gracious glance upon the young shepherd, which he received with well-bred composure.

'That's what I say, Miss Langtoft,' added Paul. 'He can do anything.'

Winlaw modestly disclaimed any such unlimited accomplishments; although at that moment his feelings distinctly belied his assertion. He was conscious, as he had been the other night, of a remarkable exhilaration, imparting to him a sense of omnipotence, which sprang apparently from his contact with these cultivated people.

'At any rate, you have a very clear appreciation of the peculiar attractions of these moorlands,' said Clare, again looking into the young man's face. 'I should quite expect it,' she continued, smiling, as

Hugh lowered his eyes before her scrutiny.
‘ You look like the incarnation of the intelligence of these hills, Mr. Winlaw.’

Paul wished that the words were being addressed to him, since they seemed to imply the speaker’s particular interest in such incarnation. Margaret heroically imposed silence upon herself, as she nearly always did in Clare’s company.

‘ But it is saddening,’ Clare went on, as the others kept silence; her eyes turned again upon the model. ‘ Contemplation is thrust upon you, and scope for action so terribly limited. I can only do with it in doses. It drives you back to the very elements of this unintelligible existence, and I am not brave enough to be a philosopher. That hopeless, lonesome wail, which every curlew, every plover, every sheep even, every breath of wind through

the heather—yes, and even every babble of the joyful burn thrusts upon you, is positively exasperating. The pill must be gilded,' she said, more gaily, 'or it is altogether too bitter. You do not want to be so persistently reminded that you must live and die alone.'

Hugh had glanced furtively at her face whilst she was speaking, an unusual expression of eagerness upon his features, and when she ceased he silently nodded and looked away.

'How doleful!' interposed Paul. 'I thought you liked our moorlands.'

'I do. I love them to desperation,' replied Clare, with quite unexpected vehemency; but instantly changed her tone. 'They are exquisite, especially on a day like this.'

All eyes followed hers to the prospect

through the window, and all lungs joined readily in the laughter which it excited. It was drear indeed. All the expanse of moorland wet and dripping, 'overhung with the infinite of silent grey.' Strangely it led them into a more jovial channel.

In the meantime, Mr. Crook was zealously engaging in his duties as cook, to the continuous amusement of his assistant Maisie. He would ask for this and that, according to his needs, and she displayed an unusual alacrity in ministering to his wants.

'We will astonish them, Maisie,' the vicar continually ejaculated, amidst other remarks of a heterogeneous description. 'Feeling more settled, Maisie, eh? That's right. Just a dash of pepper. You'll be quite happy here after a time, I know.'

You are more accessible, you know. We can see more of you. You don't dislike our coming in this way, do you ?'

' It is very kind of you all, Mr. Crook.'

' No, no, don't turn it like that, or you'll make us uncomfortable. That won't do at all.'

He wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

The young woman was thinking of her reception of the clergyman by the burn-side, when he had unintentionally encountered her some time ago. She had seen him since, but not alone.

' But I am sure it is. I know what is meant for kindness, although I may be rude sometimes.'

She blushed slightly at the allusion. She had for some time been wishing to make it.

'Bah, bah!' said the vicar, as he put some finished trout into the dish on the fender. 'I know what you mean, Maisie; but do you think I can't understand it? I know what were your feelings that day. Not a word about it. The blame was mine.'

'I hope you will forgive me, Mr. Crook, and forget it.'

The clergyman stood up to his full height, such height as he could command, and, with a hand upon each hip, he looked at her.

'Now, my dear Maisie,' he said, with some emphasis, 'does it seem to you to be rankling in my mind?'

'Oh, no, sir.'

'Well, I should hope not. But, you know,' he added, lifting a finger and put-

ting on an expression of playful gravity,
'not sir to me.'

And he just touched her arm very gently. The girl made no response to his look or action, she simply gazed submissively into the fire. The gentleman turned away quickly to his duty.

'We will astonish them, Maisie,' he presently ejaculated.

'Done?' cried Clare, a few minutes later.

'On the very point of it——'

'What on earth!' cried Paul, peeping through the doorway, and bursting into a peal of laughter.

'Come in, Paul; come in!' And they all came in to see him.

Not long afterwards all were seated at

the table, at one end of which sat Hugh and at the other his sister. The conversation flowed merrily along. Miss Langtoft and Paul occupied one side of the table (the young squire nearest to his shepherd's sister), Margaret and the vicar the other.

‘Oh, how I wish I could draw, Mr. Crook!’ Paul was saying, merrily. ‘You should be famous, if I could. “The Vicar of High Feldom taking duty,” we might call it. Couldn’t we manage it, Miss Langtoft?’

‘I am afraid not.’

‘I will do it for you myself, my dear Paul,’ said the vicar, ‘if you will have it worthily framed.’

‘I promise you. Come, it is agreed.’

‘But you won’t let the radicals get a glimpse of it, or they will turn it into

an electioneering cartoon to a certainty. "The State Church and the fulfilment of her duties," and that kind of thing, you know.'

'Certainly ; have no fear.'

'I should take it as a guarantee that she was fulfilling her duties very efficiently,' observed Clare; 'at any rate, in one remote mountain parish. Wouldn't you, Miss Whinstone?'

'I am sure I should. It is the case of the greatest amongst us being the servant of all,' said Margaret, with a diffident giggle.

'Miss Whinstone, you make me quite uncomfortable. I feel as if I had been posing,' said the vicar.

'Excellent, excellent!' was the cry of the rest ; and Margaret was elate at what she felt to be her first success of the day.

The company was so small that they but seldom divided for separate conversation. Nevertheless, there were, of course, individual attentions to be paid in small matters of the table, and from their juxtaposition some of these lay between Paul and Miss Winlaw. It was noticeable that they were effected without restraint.

Paul had suspected from the outset that her attitude towards him had become modified, and from a persistent kindness he seemed wishful to confirm the change. The resentment or antipathy which Maisie had of late made no effort to conceal was wholly absent to-day. Curiously it was replaced by what appeared to be a shade of timidity in her bearing. This enabled Paul to regard her more easily, and he from time to time, with interest, compared her features with the drawing which he

had discovered at the vicarage, and which had lingered in his mind. Once the girl's eyes caught him in his scrutiny, and, not unnaturally, she blushed. The vicar observed it.

'I was just thinking, Miss Winlaw, how ridiculous I must have looked in my drenched clothing,' said Paul.

'Certainly not ridiculous, sir.'

'Didn't I? I have a great dislike to being caught unconscious or asleep, Mr. Crook.'

As a matter of fact, Maisie, who had taken him for dead, had thought that he looked quite uncommonly beautiful.

'Conceited self-consciousness, that's all,' replied the vicar, drily.

'Oh, thank you. I am glad to know.'

Paul exchanged a smile with Miss Winlaw; as the latter removed her eyes they

crossed the window to which she was opposite. Some consequent expression of her features was noticed by the vicar, and he looked in the same direction. Maisie turned to him.

‘Did you see who it was, Mr. Crook?’

‘See? What?’

The other laughed.

‘I thought somebody passed the window.’

‘I saw nothing.’

‘You don’t think so, Miss Whinstone?’ said Hugh, interrogatively.

‘Oh, no,’ was the emphatic reply. ‘It is such a gloomy way of looking at things.’

‘It is, I know; ridiculously so, and I take care to avoid it.’

‘Can one avoid a constitutional point of

view, Miss Langtoft?' asked the vicar, who had heard the last few sentences sideways.

' If it is constitutional only to the extent of an embryo, and if one is conscious that it is a point of view, I think so; in a deep, fully developed nature certainly not.'

' You are too modest,' replied the clergyman, smiling. ' I am an old-fashioned fellow, and don't at all like all this modern introspection in the young; an objective attitude is the right term, is it not? It leads to a lot of what I call mooning,—merely a symptom of nervous debility. Volition becomes paralyzed: a distaste for all solid employment sets in. It is reflected in the glut in the book market. It appals me to peep into the booksellers'. Half-fledged scribblers, who imagine them-

selves poets, novelists, and what not, deluge the world with their morbid hallucinations and hysterics, and fancy they are offering valuable analyses of human nature. If they are honest, and admit that they write balderdash, but prefer to make a living in such a way, then they are criminals, endeavouring to shirk in a very mean manner the wholesome primeval curse. Men were made to work and not to moon. I remember, when I was at college, in some text-book on mental or moral philosophy, or something of that sort, reading a case of some diseased unfortunate who took two hours to make up his mind to get his coat on,—literally so, if you had stood with a pistol at his temple. That is what much of our youth is growing to, and, what is more appalling, the better portion of it too, I fear.'

' You would institute conscription or the galleys as an antidote to advanced education ?' asked Clare, with a twinkle.

' Something of that sort,' replied Mr. Crook, and burst out laughing at his own earnestness.

' And the world would be a great deal happier,' Margaret ventured to interpose.

' It would, as a consequence ; but happiness is beside the question, Miss Whinstone, if you will excuse me. That is the one thing that can safely look after itself. Every healthy person is happy. When it is the reverse, there is disease. Action alone can promote health. The only accepted gospel now-a-days is that of Ecclesiastes and the Apocrypha.'

With a smile, Mr. Crook poured himself out a glass of sherry, and held it up.

' My toast is "To all honest labour."'

It was accepted with acclamation, and soon after they all rose from the table.

There was a movement to the parlour; but in passing out the clergyman caught Clare and Hugh by the arm and detained them.

'This weather is an abominable annoyance,' he began, looking towards the window. 'I tell you what it is, Miss Langtoft, Hugh will have to drive you home in his coal-cart. Have you any objection?'

Clare laughed at this ridiculous outcome of the gentleman's inordinate seriousness.

'Not in the slightest. I should enjoy it beyond measure.'

'I might have known it,' he said, genially. 'That will do, then. We will exercise our ingenuity, Hugh.'

They then turned to follow the others ; but this time it was Clare that took the arm of the clergyman.

‘ We’ll follow in a minute, Hugh.’

‘ Oh, Mr. Crook,’ said the young lady, in an off-hand manner, when they were alone, ‘ would you mind giving me my portrait from your sketch-book ? My aunt would so much like to have it.’

‘ It is such a rough thing, Miss Langtoft,’ replied the vicar, evasively. ‘ I am ashamed of it for such a subject. If you really wish for it, I will polish it up a bit, and let you have it in a day or two.’

‘ But it is just this identical one that I wish, rough as it is : please.’

‘ Do allow me !’ pleaded the clergyman ; ‘ for my own credit, you know.’

‘ I am inexorable,’ pursued Clare, holding out her hand childwise.

The poor vicar was in a corner. Never until that moment had it occurred to him that perhaps it was hardly the thing to have parted with it to anybody without her previous knowledge. How could he foresee such complication out of so trivial a performance?

‘Miss Langtoft,’ he said, throwing off the dissembling guise which so ill suited him, ‘I must humbly implore your pardon. Thoughtlessly I have behaved in anything but a courteous manner——’

‘You have not given it away, Mr. Crook?’

‘Temporarily it is out of my possession; but before you leave here you shall have it. Say that you forgive me. I looked at it abstractly, and was quite blind to the practical side of the transaction.’

‘I should like to have it before I go,

please. Of course,' she added, 'I acquit you.'

Then they joined the others.

As soon as possible Mr. Crook drew Paul out of the room.

'In plain English, you have got me into a mess, Mr. Paul,' the vicar began, gravely. 'Fork out that sketch.'

'What, has she asked for it?'

'She has, and I have promised it before we leave this house.'

Paul walked to the window.

'I don't think I shall give it up,' he said, looking out at the dreary prospect.

'Come, come, my dear fellow, no joking. You must see that it is a most unjustifiable proceeding on my part to give it you —really ungentlemanly. Let us right it and start fair.'

'Refer Miss Langtoft to me. Say that I refuse to give up my property.'

'My dear Paul, perpend. Is it likely to advance you? Declining her simple request at the very outset. Upon all grounds it is an impossible course. Holding her picture against her will?'

'Yes, I don't see why not. I am sure I shall never get one with her consent.'

Here was an unexpected glimpse, and it took the vicar wholly by surprise.

'Excuse my saying that such a conclusion is nonsense at such a stage of the proceedings. You have shown your cards, Paul, unmistakably. Do you think a young lady with a spark of delicacy will forthwith play up to them? Come, look at things reasonably, my dear boy.'

'Yes, yes, of course you are right, Mr. Crook. Here it is. I am annoyed at

having got you into such a scrape, but you can soon make it up. Make my apologies. I don't think it is any good staying here much longer.'

'Nor I. We propose going in the cart.'

'Yes, that will do. We shall meet the carriage by the plantation.'

Clare had got the sketch, to the slight disturbance of subsequent intercourse. But, when Mr. Crook was resolute, he seldom stopped short of an accomplishment. He found ample material for amusement in the preliminary upholstering of the ungainly cart, and, as Margaret and Hugh knew nothing of the inopportune incident, they were invaluable as allies.

The men very soon went out and constructed a rude framework for the top of

the cart by tying some thin larch-poles together, and over this they fastened an oil-skin sheet. The result, in appearance, was a very presentable substitute for a rural carrier's waggon. In the bottom was laid a thick bed of 'fairrn,' the brown dead bracken of the previous year, the remains of a rick of which stood near the house,—this material being used as litter on moorland homesteads where straw is at a premium. When all was finished and the horse yoked, the vehicle duly appeared at the door.

Margaret openly tittered: Clare smiled. Maisie, it must be owned, needlessly blushed.

'These travelling vans are getting fashionable,' observed the vicar, as he stood on the threshold rubbing his hands, and complacently regarding their handiwork.

‘This particular one has only one drawback; as yet, it possesses no seat. We wish to consult you as to your preferences in this respect. The choice is not exactly unlimited, but is wide enough. First, the primitive plank, stretched from side to side, and affording no rest to the back, and—and not the most luxurious of cushions. Secondly, the common domestic chair, which Hugh will provide for the occasion, and which, it were as well to observe, is liable to upset at the minor irregularities of the roadway.’

‘Such roadway consisting mainly of irregularities, major and minor,’ suggested Clare, gravely.

The vicar bowed.

‘Such roadway consisting wholly of irregularities. Thirdly, the groundwork of fern itself, which is at least dry; in

common with most elementary institutions, secure; and of a thickness calculated to yield to all the more ordinary trials of the passage. There are others—'

'Which I think we may dispense with,' said Clare. 'Miss Whinstone, can you select for us from these more customary of methods?'

'I should think it would be safest to sit in a corner in the fern,' said Margaret, with a giggle.

'Such undoubtedly is my vote,' added Clare.

'And that of every philosopher. Ladies, then, the carriage is prepared.'

Maisie stood in the doorway to watch them depart, and remained there until the rumbling of the springless cart had died away, and the vehicle itself had dis-

appeared behind the first indistinct ridge of heather. A medley of thoughts and feelings thronged upon her now that she was alone, not the least of which was a new irksome sense of loneliness, and perhaps momentary discontent. No glimpse of human life was visible anywhere around her, nor evidence of its existence. Even the sweep of uniform undulation, brown and barren, was obscured by a filmy mist of rain which blended earth and sky to a space of sullen grey, totally without form and void. Even the wind sighed at the dreary journey it had to make. As the voice of a lonely bird came to her from afar, Maisie turned and re-entered the now lonely house.

CHAPTER III.

THE CRUMBS.

IN the forsaken room there still lay the disordered remains of the sumptuous repast. Maisie had but just entered it, when she stood with her hand upon the back of a chair, in an attitude of surprise. She waited, expectant, and the knock upon the door was repeated; this time beyond all possibility of doubt.

‘Then it was he,’ she muttered to herself.

There in the rain stood a young man.

Their eyes met, and for a few seconds there was silence.

‘May I come in *now?*’ he at length asked, ill-humouredly. ‘I have been waiting for two hours.’

‘Where?’

‘Under the fern-rick, until I had to dodge them. I saw that you had company,’ he continued, with an undisguised sneer; ‘sae thought that——’

‘I carena what you thought,’ interposed Maisie, resentfully; ‘if you canna be civil, just gang about your business.’

Nevertheless, he entered.

‘Ho, this is how you do it, is it?’ he exclaimed at the spectacle in the kitchen. ‘Champagne, by gad!’

‘It is,’ remarked the other; ‘and what may you be pleased to say to it?’

‘Oh, naething, my lass; naething at a’.

But ye'll ha'e got a good place, likely.'

'Now, look here, George Rutherford!' Maisie said, facing him, with the knuckles of one hand doubled on the table, and those of the other planted against her side, 'I'll not have you here talking like this. I ken what's wrong wi' you. Just sit you down in this chair, there—' she took him by the shoulder and planted him,—'and get your belly full. Dinna speak another word to me until you've done it. If you do, look, you'll gang away ower the moor fasting. Now, to work!'

She had cleared a space at the table for him, and put him a clean knife and fork and plate. Silently he obeyed her, helping himself forthwith to a considerable remaining fraction of a chicken that lay before him.

Maisie's diagnosis was presumably accu-

rate, judging by this brisk, unconditional acceptance of her terms. A grim smile played about the man's features as he ate voraciously. The young woman, meanwhile, busied herself in restoring the place to some order.

Presently the visitor rose to reach a champagne-bottle; it was empty. A second one he found to be in the same condition. He merely snorted at the disappointment.

'There's some claret left, and some sherry,' said Maisie, in response to his movements.

'That's physic. Will you give me some ale?'

She went and drew him some. Then he proceeded as before.

From flesh he advanced to sweets, and from that to fruit. At length he sat back

in his chair with an aspect of more composure. As Maisie passed beside him, he held out his hand to touch her, but she simply brushed it away.

‘Do you feel better, then?’

‘I do.’

‘Then you may talk, and mind you behave yourself.’

‘Did they leave a cigar, Maisie?’

‘No, they didn’t.’

He took another chair by the side of the fire, and Maisie went on with her occupations. For a short time he watched her complacently in silence.

‘You’re bonnie, Maisie, varry bonnie,’ he observed at last; ‘and I never saw you look bonnier than you do at this moment. You’ll ha’ been making it up wi’ the parson likely?’

‘Certainly.’ . .

What a look he gave her ! From jest to nothing short of tragedy in an instant.

‘Do you mean it ?’ he said, grasping the wooden arms of his chair.

‘Ay, why not?’ she said, looking at him haughtily.

‘Do you mean it, Maisie ? Do you mean to say you’ll wed that little, auld, shrivelled devil ? Will you now ?’

‘He is, at any rate, a gentleman,’ began the girl, angrily, ‘and is no——’

‘Gie me your pardon, Maisie. I had no thought to affront you. Dinna say it, my lass. I was a fool to speak it. The thought of it angered me, as well it might. Forgie me, lass, forgie me.’

From sudden anger the man had sunk to the extremity of humiliation before the torrent of indignation that he had aroused

in her. After hurling a volume of contemptuous epithets at the man, Maisie turned and left the room.

The visitor, who had risen from his chair to approach her, now stood still beside the table with knitted eyebrows and lips apart. It seemed as though he had been about to speak, but had been able, at the last moment, to curb his tongue by a violent exercise of self-restraint. But the look which he threw after her was enough, and in it humility found no place. The parlour-door slammed.

‘You shall not marry him, my lass, sae dinna think it,’ he muttered, between his teeth; and then he paced the floor.

To and fro he went, with his eyes turned to the ground. There was something noticeable about the man over and above the common-place attributes of the normal

representative of pastoral life. His features looked young, but his face old. He was of average height and build, but suggested muscle more than flesh. In fact, at the present moment, his whole aspect bespoke the unflinchingly aggressive. His countenance was typically rugged, and, if I may use the phrase, animally intellectual. His eyebrows were sharp and prominent—beetle-browed—beneath which the resolute eyes lay deep-set, the upper lid scarce visible; nose narrow but bold, flanked by high cheek-bones, all the more noticeable because of the hollow, shaven cheeks beneath. A full-grown moustache screened the lips, but no other hair obscured his face. In his present state of perturbation he was constantly biting the ends of the moustache, and again removing them with his fingers with nervous impatience. No

sound was audible from the other room, although the man once stood by the door to listen.

His features began at length gradually to relax, and he once more approached the doorway. He stood within it and paused. The wind moaned lightly as it came under the door in the passage, but there was no other sound. He relented, again he was humble, and meant to call. Before he had done so, the parlour door suddenly opened, and Maisie confronted him there as he stood.

‘Have you no gone yet?’ she asked.

‘Gone? no, Maisie, and not going in this way. I tell you I’m sorry for my hasty words, and what can lass want more? Come awa and make peace wi’ me. I canna leave you angry. Gie me your hand, if you winna let me kiss you.’

‘Never mind my hand,’ she said. ‘Get in and behave better.’

She followed him into the kitchen. In the room he turned round to face her.

‘Maisie, my dear lass, I canna go on like this. A man canna live on fractious words from one he’s ower fond of. I’ll no believe that you’re going to marry him. Tell me true, now, do.’

He looked at her kindly, smiling; his face was wholly transformed. The girl, too, laughed.

‘Do you think that gentlefolk like that ask shepherds’ sisters to marry them?’

‘I ken that it’s no just customary; but I’ll no guarantee what any man may do wi’ you. You’re too good for the very best of them.’

‘Therefore nearly good enough for you? You are modest.’

‘A woman should measure a man by his love, and, if you do that, you’ll put me at the top.’

‘According to your own word.’

‘And not my deed, Maisie? Have I no been your servant these many months without so much as a kind word to help me? Have I boasted in my words of what I have no shown in my doings? Have I ever had a thought of any other girl in the whole of the countryside?’

‘No, George,’ replied Maisie, quite seriously, ‘I dinna believe that you have, but for your own sake, I wish you would do it. I have never deceived you. I told you months ago that I could not marry you, and I say so now.’

She did look beautiful as she stood there before him, for she had taken some pains with her appearance out of respect to her

recent company, and she was still just as they had left her, with the exception of a white apron which she had put on. This rather enhanced her attractiveness than otherwise.

The girl had pronounced her decision solemnly, with her eyes looking into those of her companion. She saw his features twitch, and, to her consternation, she saw those deep-set, unflinching eyes opposite betray quite an agony of emotion.

‘ You did tell me, Maisie,’ he exclaimed, vehemently, seizing her hand and retaining it; ‘ but it was months ago. You canna, canna tell me it again now. Oh, my darling lassie, gie me time. I canna live without you.’

He leaned forward to kiss her hand passionately, hurting her by his grasp, and on the white back of it one tear fell;

then he released it, and turned abruptly away.

Maisie stood thunderstruck. She had known for long that the man was in love with her, but this intensity of passion she had not looked for in him. It painfully disconcerted her, for she was quick in sympathy. Moreover, it presented him in altogether a new light. Everything became so unplayful, so bitterly serious. She could only cast a perplexed look upon him as he stood by the window with his back towards her. This was the man to whom she had persistently behaved peremptorily ; with a sense of power (rather scornful withal) over his smallest movement. One moment had changed it all. She felt powerless now before him, and dismayed.

‘ Whatever should make you think that

I can marry Mr. Crook?' she said, after a short silence. 'Look at his position and mine.'

He made no answer.

'I hope you do not say such things to anybody else, for it wouldna be pleasant for him or for me.'

'A' the world kens it,' he said, impatiently.

'Then a' the world kens a good deal more than I do myself.'

'Tell me the truth, Maisie,' said the man, abruptly, turning to face her. 'Has he never asked you to marry him?'

'No, indeed he has not; nor shown any signs of it,' she asserted, intrepidly.

As she spoke, the young man moved away from the window.

'Here's the cart!' he said, in the old tone of apparent resignation.

Maisie looked vexed, and turned quickly towards her suitor.

'George, I can never marry you; but I shall never marry anybody.'

There was an impulsiveness in her manner not usual with her. The man made no response by word or look; but seated himself in a chair.

'Tarr'ble stormy the day,' said an unexpected voice through the open doorway, and Maisie and her visitor looked up.

'Oh, Isaac, are you here?' exclaimed the girl, in surprise. 'Come in, man. You'll be wet likely.'

'Oh, no, hinny,' replied the old man as he entered. 'We hae come awa' brawly i' your new coach. I met Hughie just anent the plantin, sae it wouldna do but I must just alang wi' him.'

' Of course. It's no further round for you.'

The new-comer proceeded to unwrap a black and white check plaid which enfolded him to the waist, and then he took the chair which Maisie had placed for him.

' What brings ye doon, Isaac?' asked Rutherford.

' I hae been through to Turvielaws to see thae auctioners.'

' About the woo' likely?'

' Ay, ay, hinny.'

' Will Rea no take it, then?'

' Ou, ay, man, he'll take it hard eneugh; but the master's aye for some new thing, ye ken.'

' Ah—ha!'

' I like thae auctioners badly, George,' said the old man, presently.

' So you ha' told me, Isaac.'

'Why, look you, they're just naething but a pack o' thieves entirely athegither. Thae mairts, ye ken, are the herriment o' stock farming. They keep down the prices to just naething at a', for it's no likely that the butchers will buy yane against another, ye ken. They 'gree upon it, man ; yane takes yae lot and another takes the next at just whatever they've a mind to gie. And they're putting an end to a' the fairs i' the countryside. And thae auctioners charge mair nor the auld fair tolls.'

It was noticeable that old Isaac Outchester and George Rutherford never met without immediately discovering that they had some dire grievance clamouring for discussion.

'Ay, it's true, Isaac,' replied George ; 'and I'll tell you what it is, man. These marts are only kept going because of the

ignorance of the farmers. They daurna gan to a fair to choose their stock themselves, but they just take the auctioneer's word for the quality of it, do you see.'

' Tarr'ble like the thing,' said the old man, with an approving nod. ' As like the thing as can be, George. I dinna ken what's to become o' stock farming in these days.'

' There'll have to be a change in this and ither things,' observed George, significantly.

' I doubt sae, hinny.'

' We maun have some small holdings, for one thing. What for should we a' be servants when one man has many a thousand acres? It's the land we want to get at.'

' I've heard you say that before, George,' remarked Hugh, as he entered the room;

'and there's a good deal of truth in it, if you go about it in a reasonable way.'

'They winna let us go about it in a reasonable way,' replied the other, sharply.

'Ou, ay. They will, man.'

'You've cause enough to uphold 'em, Hugh, we ken, but all of us haven't.'

Winlaw smiled at the innuendo. Isaac looked from one to the other.

'Dinna bring Ireland over here, George,' he said. 'We maunna sink doon to the like o' them.'

'Hear, hear, Isaac,' Hugh interposed, 'we shall make something of you yet.'

'I ken nicely that we want a deal o' change,' the old man went on, deprecating Hugh's tone of approval, but with his habitual smile, always of calm and genial

aspect, however revolutionary the opinions he propounded; ‘but I’m nane o’ your home-rulers, look you. That’s a’ a tarr’ble and false delusion, ye ken. Ye ha’ only to look at langsyne affairs to see the right o’ that. If you gie Ireland home-rule, Scotland will want it an’ a’, and, my sartie! there’ll be het wark for ye hereawa’ on the border, if that day should come round again. Look at a’ thae camps and battle-fields outby! Ye’ve read i’ the history, George; tak tent til’t, man. They had home-rule in thae days, ye ken.’

Hugh laughed readily; but the other listener was as serious as the speaker himself, and could see nothing mirthful about it.

‘ Haud awa, you gowk,’ he said, impatiently; ‘do you think we’ll tak to war again?’

'The varry self and same, I'se warr'nd ye.'

'There's no knowing what they'll do, Isaac,' said Hugh. 'If you——'

'Na, na, Hughie. I'll no gan wi' you, either. In maist respecks they're i' the right of it, but I sair mistrust their home-rule doctrines, ye ken. Whunstane 'ull get nae vote frae me, sae dinna think it, man.'

'I should think not,' said George, derisively. 'What will he do for the country-side? Why, he kens naething about it.'

'What does it matter what the man is?' Hugh asked, mildly. 'Do you think I care two pins about him? I simply look to the general principles of the party that he represents. He'll be a sheep like the rest of them, and follow the leader over the dyke, sae he'll do well enough for

want of a better. But do you think,' he went on, more warmly, 'do you think I'll gie my hand to the destruction o' that's beautiful i' the world? Do you think I'll let you pull down a' that helps a man to forget the sordid misery of his animal existence here, and no raise my finger to try and stop ye? That's what ye radicals want to do. Ye want to level a' human life to just such a dreary waste as that moorland outby there. Look at it, man!' he said, pointing to the window. 'That's socialism, radicalism, or democracy, whatever you call it. A' the same colour,—nay, a' the same want o' colour, a' the same dreary level. Does it cheer ye, my lad? And yet that's what you're fighting for.'

Maisie cast a quick glance at her brother, then paused in her occupation, looking away.

'But ye canna live on colour,' said Rutherford, pugnaciously.

'No, your belly canna, but some people have a wee bit hunger higher up.'

'And they ken nicely how to feed it,' was the sarcastic rejoinder. 'I came in at the hinder end, Hugh.'

'I am glad you did, George. Get us a drop o' whisky, Maisie lass.' Hugh felt he might be getting angry.

'And do you think they want to make anything but a fool of you, Hugh?' asked Rutherford, more genially, a few minutes later. 'I thought ye would have had mair sense than to be caught wi' a painted hackle. You're a sharp lad, do you see, and they're scarry on you, sae they've made a friend of you.'

Hugh smiled.

‘Ay, ay, we’ll say so, George.’

‘They’ll be for getting you to Whinstone’s meetings, nae doubt?’

‘I shall need no getting, man, I can tell you. Mind you come yoursel’, and we’ll put a pickle sense into you.’

‘Ou, ay, I shall come. And you come to ours to-morrow and all. When do you start?’

‘Next week they’ll be about here. Windyhaugh on Thursday, and Feldom on Saturday.’

Maisie was observant of the conversation as it proceeded, and from her position here and there as she moved about the room she was able to examine the features of the speakers without herself being seen doing so. Until quite recently she had shared much of Rutherford’s feelings with regard to their aristocratic acquaintances,

and to some degree resented what appeared to her a propitiatory patronage; now such imputation appeared offensive to her. She could not in set terms account for the change, for she had not analysed it; the result alone concerned her. It must have followed that her ardent suitor did not profit by such modification of her attitude.

Nevertheless, she viewed him with a greatly increased interest to-day, if with no material accession of tenderness. He had revealed to her the passion of love, and, as a woman of some sincerity of temperament, the revelation was of significance to her. In truth, it had created in her a sense of fear. She had herself never as yet loved; nor had she studied the subject abstractly through the channel of sentimental literature. What she had thought of as playful, as composed merely

of all the lighter varieties of diversion, was suddenly transformed into an ugly fact, invested with the most painful, most tragical possibilities. And from this, another step. If pity is akin to love, then had George Rutherford unknowingly made a substantial advance towards his ultimate wishes, for Maisie pitied him most sincerely.

The man little suspected the hopefulness of his position. It was the very distrust of every glimmer of hope that goaded him on to such indiscriminate perversity. For the time being, he cared not how he appeared to her. Occasionally he attempted to put a playful aspect upon his gibes ; but it could not last long, and nobody for a moment doubted the genuine bitterness of his temper.

It was nearly five o'clock before the rain

showed any signs of abating, or the men of breaking up their talk. When a move was at length made, Hugh and the old man went out to look at something in the byre, and Rutherford pretended to follow them. At the door the latter stopped, and then came back into the kitchen.

‘ Maisie, will you have that from me?’ he said, holding out what appeared to be a gold brooch.

The girl was surprised, and looked at him in doubt.

‘ Will you no?’

‘ I canna take it, George, after what I have told you.’

He laughed carelessly and turned away.

‘ Good-bye, my lass.’

‘ Good-bye.’

CHAPTER IV.

MARGARET CAUGHT NAPPING.

'H'm!' commented Mrs. Monk, when Clare had gone away to dress, 'not wholly satisfactory, it seems. I am curious for details.'

Clare's entrance had interrupted the lady in a perusal of the latest Russian novel, in French of course, to which she was now at liberty to revert. Clare sang as she ascended the stairs, and the rain pattered musically upon the panes.

Mrs. Monk was lying upon a couch in the drawing-room, a position to which she

was much addicted when living in the country. She read on for half a page, and then it was seen that no further progress was made. Her finger was placed between the leaves ready to turn one over, but the leaf was not turned. Indeed, her eyes were no longer upon the print; they appeared upon a level with the rough top edges of the book, which had been cut with a paper-knife, and upon her dainty little shoes beyond. It was a pity that none of her acquaintances could see her.

Her features, to any most casual gaze, must always have been interesting, if at the same time problematical. Upon them was stamped her claim to individuality of some sort—a silent claim which few who chanced to come in contact with her failed, consciously or unconsciously, to recognize. Mrs. Monk, conscious enough of this as of

all else about her, had carefully cultivated her expressive features, but with such completeness of artistic finish that nature and art had become blended, and not the shrewdest of her critics could now discern in her slightest movement the conscious turn of the artist.

It was, indeed, this consummate self-mastery which had rendered the lady so familiarly intelligible to her companion, Clare. Throughout the latter's growth, Mrs. Monk had discerned and directed the girl's character—by no means a complex one; rather developing what was naturally apparent in her, than endeavouring to establish any particular standard of her own; and she had consciously adjusted herself to such an individual as she perceived Clare to be. Mrs. Monk's versatility would have enabled her equally well

to adjust herself to a temperament of an entirely different character, if such had been Clare's requirements.

This was not the result of what the ordinary world might call a vulgar hypocrisy in Mrs. Monk. She had sometimes remarked to her niece that she had ever been spared taking life seriously, and it was the instinctive, if vague, perception of this quality in the lady that aggravated such a nature as that of the vicar of High Feldom. He called it absence of sentiment; and perhaps that was as good a designation as could be found for it. The lady simply meant that she had been born without any intuitive solution of the universe, that she had not had the good fortune to pick one up on her journey since, and that the deficiency had played some havoc with what most of us tena-

ciously cling to as our moral nature. Had Mrs. Monk been born a stranger to riches, or with just a little additional solidity of character, her history would, no doubt, have been an entirely different one.

She had never been impelled to assume any definite part, intellectual or actual, in the existing world around her. She simply sailed pleasantly over the surface of the current in which most mortals are doomed, naked and neck-deep, to swim, and she had consequently escaped the numerous ills—cramp, heart-chill, and the like—from which too many of these are known to suffer. Rocks which have confronted others, and upon which hands have been lacerated and strength consumed in the bitter effort to cleave a passage through them, were, by this favoured lady, skirted

gracefully without undue strain upon a single muscle, and without the needless waste of a single tear. Lacking in herself such positive assumption of a definite rôle, Mrs. Monk remained at liberty to regard dispassionately the more pre-occupied throng around her; and, should occasion require, literally to be such character as she found it desirable to personate. Pre-disposed to nothing, she was open to be everything. It followed, as a corollary, that her judgment upon a mere work of art would have been enunciated positively, and would, in all likelihood, have been altogether worth the hearing: upon all topics ethical she was absolutely without opinion, and simply assumed the attitude likely to interest or aggravate the individual controversialist of the moment.

Perhaps, during these moments of pri-

vacy and repose, something of this might have been read by a shrewd observer in Mrs. Monk's countenance. Her claim to mere intellect was always palpable in her broad, unclouded forehead, which overarched rather sharply a pair of deep-set, noticeable eyes. These latter almost defied analysis, for neither in expression nor hue were they constant for any length of time together. When in comparative rest, as now, dispassionate rather than cynical criticism was the foremost expression of their dark grey depths; but it required no great stretch of imagination to transform that into a glow of furious scorn, or a sparkle of careless merriment. It was not easy to subdue them to the graver, heavier expression of sympathy or sentiment of any kind. But, in suggesting this difficulty, other features, no doubt,

played an inseparable part. The clear-cut nose, with the exquisitely-carved and mobile nostrils, owned as little of the moralist as the proud, self-confident lips.

For a long time Mrs. Monk continued in this attitude of contemplation, until at length her lips were parted, and muttered words issued from them.

'Clearly that wouldn't do; but . . . but I don't think Clare's a fool.'

The dainty feet were re-crossed, and again there was silence.

Not long thereafter there was a step and a voice on the stairs, and the young lady herself appeared in flagrant confirmation of the negative suggested by her aunt. Miss Langtoft did not look a fool.

'Oh, ma Mignonne,' she sighed, dropping on the couch at her aunt's feet, 'I am a-weary, a-weary.'

‘And, perhaps, would that you were dead?’

‘By no means, my dear. I was never more enamoured of life. But—but you should tramp away up the Braidstruther Burn.’

‘No, Clare, I shouldn’t. I have some acquaintance with the law of cause and effect.’

‘Oh, you are going to be facetious. I have done. Has the library-box come?’

‘No, it has not. But something else has; something to delight you.’

Clare looked up inquiringly.

‘Not my—— Oh, you are too bad! Something ridiculous; what is it?’

‘Nothing ridiculous by any means. Mrs. Whinstone wants us to a friendly chop tomorrow evening.’

‘Pah! I shan’t go,’ cried Clare. ‘These

people are getting a regular nuisance. Let us bolt, aunt.'

'The moors are not attractive in the rain apparently. I gave you fair warning, Clare.'

'The moors are delightful; but—but people are fools.'

Mrs. Monk laughed musically.

'That is not original. An old fellow in Chelsea discovered it before you.'

'Well, aren't they, aunt?'

'Mostly, I believe. I am afraid the poetical little parson has been too poetical. Come, Clare, it is obviously unsatisfactory. Tell me particulars.'

'Look there!' said Clare, holding out the vicar's unfortunate sketch. 'That's the biggest fool of the lot.'

Mrs. Monk looked critically at the por-

trait, then at the face of the original before her.

'Not at all bad. A wee bit lackadaisical, perhaps.'

'It was executed in three minutes.'

'H'm; but who is the fool, sitter or artist?'

'Sitter. I forgive the little man; he meant no mischief, I am sure.'

'Did he give it you as a proposal?'

Clare laughed.

'But it is vexatious, aunt, to have all one's plans upset, isn't it? At any rate, he needn't have begun so soon. That ridiculous young squire is making love to me. If I had given him a chance, I believe he would have been upon his knees to-day. It makes it so awkward. Certainly I shall not go there to-morrow.

Let us go to town for a week or two.'

Mrs. Monk did not laugh, as Clare had expected.

'It doesn't surprise you, I suppose, my dear ?'

'Certainly it does. What can he find attractive in me? What suggestion of spiritual affinity, I mean?' she added, in response to her aunt's gesture. 'I have always overburdened myself with learning in his presence, with the very purpose of avoiding this. I did think that a blue-stocking was the one effectual weapon to shield a woman from the attacks of the nobler sex; didn't you?'

'It is beginning to lose its efficacy, I fear, in these advanced days, Clare. But, bless you, child, is it so terrible? I suppose the truth is, you are afraid of succumbing to the squarely blandishments.'

'Thank you, I have no such fear,' said Clare, pinching her aunt's foot. 'But can't you see the awkwardness of it? I really want to stay here longer, but how can any intercourse proceed with these people?'

'Don't distress yourself about that. Settle the thing and have done with it. You'll know nothing about it a fortnight after. Are you such a child to the world, Clare, after all? Do you foresee melodramatic elements in every trumpery affair of this kind? If you are judicious, to-morrow evening will settle the thing for ever. Go and do it.'

Clare thought for a moment.

'Certainly, I may as well try.'

'But what about this portrait?'

'Why, the stupid little parson gave it him. It was exactly what I had expected;

but I thought I should be in time to intercept the move. However, I demanded it again, and got it with apologies.'

'H'm. The young squire did not propose to you, then ?'

'He did not.'

'Then I'll warrant the whole thing is a delusion. You always did exaggerate ridiculously men's attitudes to you. But by all means settle it. Give him an opportunity forthwith. Come, now, tell me all about your doings. If that is all that troubles your mind, you will survive it.'

And Clare launched forth into a detailed narration of her day's adventures, with which we are already sufficiently familiar.

It was some hours later that same day, and Paul Whinstone and his sister were in

the library. After dinner their mother had withdrawn to her own room, as she frequently did now, and the two were therefore left to their own resources. Upon such occasions they generally found their diversion in the billiard-room; Margaret having soon displayed a remarkable facility in handling the cue, and no less an ardour in cultivating the accomplishment; but to-night Paul was stupid, as his sister contended, and had persistently demurred to this mode of recreation. He preferred to sit in this funereal chamber in a huge, old arm-chair fantastically carved, with his legs thrust forward indolently, the heel of one foot nursed upon his knee, and between his lips a cigar. Margaret was examining the backs of the books upon the shelves.

'Pah! Nonsense, Paul!' she was say-

ing in the peremptory tone she assumed towards her brother. ‘How can you pretend to deny it? And why should you? Can’t you trust me? If you want to keep it quiet for a bit, shall I tell? I have seen it from the first day I entered the house.’

‘Are you so fond of her, Meg, that you want to imagine her your sister-in-law?’

‘She’s too mighty and condescending for my taste; but, if you’re in love with her, I’ll make myself fond of her.’

‘To think of your learning all that long ballad stuff just for her!’ she exclaimed the next moment, as Paul remained silent. ‘Nobody would make me do it, I’m sure.’

‘But I’m very fond of ballads,’ said Paul.

'Oh, yes, don't tell me.'

'Well, Margaret, to tell you the truth, I am fond of the girl; but don't you say a word to mother about it yet. She thinks I'm too young for that kind of thing.'

'Pooh, I know she does. But parents always do think we're babies all our lives. Have you told her, Paul,—Clare, I mean?'

'Oh, no.'

'I made sure you had this morning. You both pretended to be so stiff to each other as we came home in the cart. And how friendly she is with Winlaw. Why, she talks to him and behaves to him just as if he was an equal. I do think that is awfully absurd. They're all very well in their way, but we must remember that they are servants, after all.'

Just think if she comes to be mistress at the Hall here, and is so familiar with her inferiors, you won't like it, will you ?'

' But Winlaw is rather different, you know.'

' I don't see why. They must be kept in their places all the same. I am sure that sister of his is as proud as a peacock. I don't like her a bit.'

' She is proud, I know; but she's a bonnie girl. I thought she looked quite beautiful to-day. Now come, Meg, didn't you ?'

' Yes, she is pretty, of course; but it only makes her horribly conceited. As she sat at the end of the table there, I'm sure we might all have been her ladyship's servants, instead of her employers doing her a very great favour.'

'Ha, ha!' laughed Paul. 'I don't suppose she saw much favour in it.'

'That is just what I say,' exclaimed the young lady, resentfully. 'Then I should make her see it. What will it come to, Paul, if your wife goes about having tea with all the shepherds' wives on the hills, and talking about poetry and history to them just as she would to me? As if they understood anything about it!'

'To tell you the truth, Madge, I don't believe in it myself.'

'And that vicar is just as bad. I don't believe he is a real gentleman, is he? What was his father?'

'A doctor, I believe.'

'Some quack, I'll be bound. I shall really feel ashamed to meet him at our dinner-table, after seeing him such a

figure. And then, if he marries that girl, will you have *her* to dinner ?'

'We will wait until the difficulty arises. But I will say I have seen many a worse girl at a respectable dinner-table. Maisie wouldn't look half bad if you rigged her out at your dressmaker's, Meg. You must admit that. She has simply a splendid figure.'

'That's all you men think about. But looks and figure aren't everything. How she talks !'

'Soon polish up that. Besides, it's rather pretty, I think. I like the northern accent.'

'Why, you had better marry her yourself, sir,' cried Margaret, out of all patience at his perversity.

'I am otherwise inclined, you see.'

Just then there was a knock upon the

door, and Paul raised himself in his chair.

'Come in!' he said. 'What is it, Purves?'

'Mr. Alan Kidland, sir, would like to see you.'

'Mr. Kidland!' cried Margaret, her face instantly beaming with mingled surprise and delight.

'Bless the fellow!' said Paul, getting up. 'Show him in here.'

'Do forgive me, my dear Paul—my dear Miss Whinstone, I mean,' said Mr. Kidland, gallantly, as he entered, rosy and redolent of the cool night air. He was clad in full riding outfit, and the spurs clanked upon his heels as he stepped forward. 'Do forgive me—will you now? It is awfully rude, and that kind of thing.'

'Not to us, Mr. Kidland,' replied Margaret, benignly. 'We are delighted to see you.'

'What on earth do you want at this hour, man?'

Mr. Kidland burst into a fit of irrepressible laughter, in which the other two irresistibly joined. For a minute by the clock all three stood there and laughed, the visitor leaning forward quite uncomfortably affected.

'P—pardon . . . honesty—igh, igh, igh, igh, igh,—honesty is . . . the best policy. I—igh, igh, ha, ha, ha!—I've ridden ridden for a wager Walter Selby. L-l-l-look at your watch, Paul.'

Thus partially delivered, Mr. Kidland abandoned himself once more unrestrainedly to the exigencies of his affection.

Presently he was easier, and he wiped the tears from his eyes and cheeks with his ample silk handkerchief.

‘Oh, it’s funny,’ he said, as he was doing so; ‘awfully funny. Four to one in fivers on it; from the Cleughbrae in thirty-five minutes. The mare’s nearly broken her legs at every step.’

‘It’s a bad bit of riding,’ interposed Paul, radiant with interest. ‘When did you leave?’

‘Eight fifty, by mine,’ he said, putting his watch beside Paul’s to compare minutes.

‘You had quite three or four minutes to spare, then.’

‘Ha, ha, ha !’

‘You are too reckless, Mr. Kidland,’ said Margaret, with a maternal expression of interest.

'Oh, no, Miss Whinstone. I was born on horseback, honour bright.'

'Is Selby coming on?' asked Paul.

'No, he's gone to Wilkwood. Oh, he will be mad!'

'Well, come and sit down, and tell us all about it. You won't? Oh, I see; come and get into shape, then. What will you have to eat?'

'I want nothing, thanks. You are having coffee? Just a cup and a biscuit.'

'Madge, give instructions, please. Come on, Alan.'

And Paul took his friend away to his dressing-room.

'Was there anybody about to take your horse, old man?'

'Yes, all right, thanks. George was in the kitchen.'

Paul laughed again.

‘Well, you are a cool dog.’

‘Oh, it is an awful joke, Paul. Do you see——’

They were again in the library sitting round the fire.

‘You’re a regular godsend, Alan,’ said Paul, in improving spirits. ‘Madge was—’

‘You are indeed, Mr. Kidland. Paul was as dull as he knows how to be, and I expect you know how dull that is. He even refused to have a game of billiards.’

‘That is tolerably strong evidence, Paul, come. But you know, Miss Whinstone, the one thing I am made for is to be of service to my friends. I lay myself out to it—make a regular study of it, you know. What you may call an amateur Samaritan. It was the Samarit—yes, that’s it. Something really very good.’

‘But where have you fellows been to?’

asked Paul, not appreciating his friend's facetious humour.

'Over to Grasslees. Selby wanted to see his uncle. The old chap is really bad, Paul. It will be Sir Walter within the next six months, I'll take any odds.'

'Does Mr. Selby succeed to the title?' asked Margaret, with peculiar interest.

'He does, Miss Whinstone, and he's going to startle the county. He has got some theory of reclaiming the whole of these border moorlands; not at law, you know,' added the gentleman, with a chuckle, 'but by a new method of cultivation. He has discovered a patent dodge for curing all the ailments of the climate, to say nothing of the peat bogs and heather. I forget how many bushels an acre he doesn't promise; something uncommonly attractive, at any rate. He's

going to read a paper to the Agricultural Society, when he's got his title. Command more attention, he says, and that sort of thing.'

Thus they talked on, touching lightly upon various topics of supreme interest, no doubt, to themselves, but not exactly of universal importance. Margaret had had a stirring day but she sat on bravely, despite the ludicrous evidence of weariness betrayed occasionally by her comely features. Directly the voice of Mr. Alan Kidland was raised in the proclamation of some individual wisdom, the young lady would check a nod, and at once offer an unclouded intellect to the consideration of his remark. Any word of his offered peculiar attractions to Margaret, and it was perhaps a question whether she sufficiently screened the amount of attention

she was anxious to pay to the least significant of his utterances.

At length this gentleman launched into the narration of an imaginary experience of his own, of a lengthy and intricate nature, and of course of the highest interest to Margaret. Judging by the previous interchange of a little dumb play between the two gentlemen, the narration was not without its object. At its commencement, Margaret aroused herself by altering her position in the chair. Kidland and Paul smiled. After exactly thirty seconds there was the inevitable nod, and the young lady looked up foolishly, inopportunely remarking, ‘How very good !’ The narrative proceeded, and Margaret nodded again. The other two countenances were strictly under command, so that she was in no way disconcerted. Mr.

Kidland's voice flowed on in its even, subdued monotone ; the experiences gradually becoming of a very disconnected, quixotic nature, and utterly without reference to the opening of the story. Presently they wholly ceased, and the gentlemen were victorious.

Kidland rose from his chair, and held up a monitory finger to his companion. He stepped to where Margaret was peacefully sleeping, and stood over her for a moment. Where, a few minutes ago, had sparkled a whole world of life and mystery, only the long, black lashes were now to be seen fringing the dark-veined, lifeless convex of the fallen lid. The thin lips were closed, and the breath came and went with childlike regularity and silence. Mr. Kidland stooped and kissed loudly the smooth, pale forehead.

Margaret opened her eyes to instant self-consciousness, and saw Paul laughing at her.

' You did it ?' Then, correcting herself, ' Oh, no, where is he ?'

She leaped from her chair, and found the culprit crouching at the back of it.

' Fairly won, Miss Whinstone,' he cried, coming forward. ' I could not resist it.'

' I will pay you out,' replied Margaret, blushing deeply ; ' see if I don't.'

' You were not asleep, Meg, were you ?' asked Paul, facetiously.

And, with a little final merriment, Margaret withdrew.

Next morning, directly after breakfast, Margaret and Mr. Kidland were together in the billiard-room. The gentleman had, but a few minutes before, been under the imperative necessity of taking horse that

particular instant upon a journey of the very first importance; but, upon being taken resolutely in hand by the pair of his entertainers, he had so far modified his intention as to sacrifice one more hour to their hospitable demands. Thus captured, Margaret had dismissed him to this chamber, there to await her royal convenience. Paul went off upon some business of his own, promising to join them there.

Mr. Kidland was engaged in balancing a billiard-cue upon the tip of his chin when the young lady entered. At her appearance he bobbed the article from its resting-place, and deftly caught it as it descended perpendicularly. Margaret shut the door, and walked forward resolutely to confront him. She looked bright enough this morning. Her hair rose up-

wards from her forehead like an ample sable crown, leaving her countenance free and unclouded; and her dark eyes shone lustrous from beneath the horizontal brows, fraught with mischief.

‘Now, Mr. Kidland, you are not going before you have given me satisfaction. Draw!’

She seized a cue and brandished it. Kidland, although taken by surprise, did the same with his, and they crossed them and recrossed in a truly martial fashion.

‘Left hand behind, please, Miss Whinstone,’ said the cavalier, as his antagonist showed signs of bringing up that member to the assistance of the right.

‘It is so heavy,’ she said, giving the man a cut upon the arm.

‘Then you may use two,’ he replied, gallantly.

This the lady did, and immediately raised her weapon to effect the head cut. Mr. Kidland ducked, and ran adroitly past her beneath her elbow.

'I yield, I yield!' he cried, as he ran round the corner of the table.

'Do you really?' cried she, in full pursuit.

'Unconditionally. Name the penance. Shall it be—to—to—do the same again?'

'Oh, you bad creature!'

This was evoked by his unexpected move. The man had suddenly turned, and Margaret had plunged straight into his outstretched arms.

Margaret was a peculiarly favourable subject for Mr. Alan Kidland's facetious humours. It was hard to imagine that he had ever been, or ever would be, in love

in his life; yet he scarcely ever met an eligible young lady that he did not approach with a more or less amorous deportment. It was not that he had ever had the remotest inclination to marriage; it was simply his way.

Miss Whinstone had, from the outset, shown herself admirably adapted to this particular form of playfulness, and Mr. Kidland had found in her quite exceptional incitements to its indulgence. Her remarkable history had tickled him, and one of the effects in her of that remarkable history, a certain *naïveté* and freedom from some of the conventional restraints of his own station, had fully sustained the tickling. And yet the best of it was that, owning this piquancy of a more natural organization, she was, after all, of his own station, hence eligible material for

whatever might befall. It is really possible that Mr. Kidland began to think more definitely of his friend's sister than even he himself at present was aware.

For her part, Margaret's purpose was definite enough, hence any attitude was considered legitimate.

Although Mr. Kidland had clasped the young lady to his breast, he stopped short of any further manifestation of affection. She wriggled from his clutches, and sank breathless in a chair. Her companion plunged his hands into his pockets, and sat against the edge of the table.

'Oh, what shall I do to you, you bad, bad thing!' cried Margaret, panting.

Alan looked humble, and ultimately raised a finger to the corner of his eye.

'Please don't, Miss Whinstone,' he said, affecting an agonised whimper.

‘Don’t what?’ she asked, quivering with delight at his inimitable humour.

‘I won’t do it again—indeed I won’t. I’ll be a good boy. Please tiss me!’

‘Kiss you, indeed,’ cried she, disdainfully, thrusting out her little foot before her. ‘How dare you use such a word to me? You must play with me against Paul,’ she continued, suddenly altering her tone at the sound of a footstep at the door. ‘Oh, here you are! We two will play you. What a time you’ve been! We shall both play to your once. Come along!’

And so they began.

Presently, whilst Mr. Kidland was engaged in one of his master strokes, Margaret whispered something to her brother, and he nodded. Then they observed the player.

'About time,' said Paul, as he marked the score. 'Where am I? . . . I say, Alan, you are not going this morning.'

'Awfully sorry—I really must.'

'But you're not going, I tell you. The Peel people and the vicar are coming to-night, and you'll have to stay to meet them.'

'Honour bright, Paul. It's deuced unfortunate; I'd give anything to stay; but I promised Flossie. She's got somebody coming to-day, and I really must go, you know.'

Margaret's visage fell. Paul seemed more philosophical about it.

'Of course, if you must, you must,' he said; and played his play.

Mr. Kidland really did go about eleven o'clock, and Margaret abandoned herself

to the extremity of despair. The disappointment was very bitter to her, for ever since his opportune arrival last night the young lady had built whole ramparts upon Mr. Kidland. He came as a ray of light into the darkness of this wretched little dinner-party. She did not confess the whole of her position to Paul, out of consideration for his feelings, but she loathed the thought of that dinner; at least, the thought of the particular company which would be assembled at it. Mr. Kidland might have saved her from it all, for with his company at command all the rest might have gone their way; but now all rescue was beyond her, and she must sink beneath the flood.

All day long she moped like a parrot that has been dipped in water. She snapped at anybody that had the misfor-

tune to come near to her; and to the maid, who at length was summoned to get her ready for the sacrifice, she was so intolerably insolent that the girl did accidentally once or twice pull her mistress's hair. It is quite probable that, had accidents possessed a little additional flexibility, she would quite as unintentionally have boxed her ears.

CHAPTER V.

OLD MUSIC.

CLARE was noticeably gracious to all present ; so much so to Paul individually that he swore that the vicar was right, and that he himself had been nothing but a fool. But the young lady's chief care seemed to be the invalid Mrs. Whinstone. To her she was more than gracious ; she was positively tender.

Miss Langtoft had throughout their acquaintance—fragmentary as it had ever been—always been favoured by this lady.

Upon her arrival to-day, Mrs. Whinstone had brightened up astonishingly, pressing forward eagerly to meet her, and positively dropping her walking-stick in her ardour to take Clare's hands affectionately between her own before she kissed her. Paul, who was at hand, hid his blush of gladness by stooping down to restore his mother's stick to her hand.

'Mother never treats me like that,' said Margaret to her brother a few minutes later.

'Pooh, pooh, nonsense, Meg.'

But Paul was glad she did not. He wanted the whole of his mother's love for this idol of his own.

Even Mr. Crook was sacrificed to Mrs. Whinstone's partiality for Clare. She must sit beside her at the table; she must hover about her in the drawing-room; she must

sing a special song for her ; and Clare was quite content to do it. Paul's eyes followed them furtively, but constantly ; and Mrs. Monk's eyes played about them all.

This lady was extremely genial, being just now even condescendingly immersed in political topics, or rather electioneering topics, with the young squire.

'The hill people are the black sheep, Mrs. Monk,' Paul said. 'We cannot do much with them, I fear, but I don't mean to leave them unattempted. As you say, Winlaw will be a great help.'

'Certainly he will,' responded she. 'Make him speak, Mr. Whinstone. The people like to hear the voice of one of themselves in these assemblies, and I am quite sure he will not disgrace you. When he sometimes forgets himself, he speaks remarkably well. He is young,

and has enthusiasm. I see your antagonists are already beginning.'

'Yes, they are to have a meeting up the dale to-morrow.'

'When do you expect your father down?'

'He is somewhere in the district now, and may be here in a day or two. I don't think he cares for the work,' added Paul, with a smile.

'Oh, doesn't he? What made him consent to stand, then?'

'I can't make out. He has not told me, and I haven't questioned him on the subject. Possibly to set me a good example. I expect that you, now, think me—well, a worthless individual,' said Paul, suddenly withdrawing his eyes from the neighbourhood of his mother's chair. 'Don't you, Mrs. Monk? Do tell me.'

'Of what value would my opinion be to you?' she asked, laughing. 'Don't get self-conscious, Mr. Paul, pray. It is a most uncomfortable ailment.'

He coloured just a little.

'Is that what you call self-consciousness? But I wish you would candidly tell me what such a life as mine ought to be; how it ought to be used, you know. I should value an expression of opinion from you. I feel that I ought to do something more than I do. Ought I to go to college, seriously, and read hard?'

'Not many gentlemen in your position do.'

'Oh, but that isn't an answer. I suppose you mean that they ought to do.'

'If nothing impels them to do it, I don't think the mere conventional conformity is of much use to them. I be-

lieve they are apt to get into less mischief in the study of trout and moor-fowl.'

'I can see your eyes twinkle,' said Paul, in a tone of disappointment. 'I know you are laughing at me. You don't take us seriously, do you? If I could only overhear what you and Miss Langtoft say about me, then I might have a chance of improving.'

'How vain you are!' cried Mrs. Monk, mercilessly. 'You think we talk about you, then?'

'I—I—hope so. I talk a good deal about you.'

Again Paul reversed his position. He saw that his mother, who was conversing earnestly with Clare, had her eyes turned upon him, as Mrs. Monk also had not failed to observe.

‘I upbraid myself more than I can tell you, my dear,’ Mrs. Whinstone was saying. ‘It is all my fault. I cannot bear him to be away from the house. He is all that I have in the whole world, Clare. It is terrible to be alone.’

‘Yes,’ said Clare, absently.

‘If he is idle, I have made him so. If his life should be fruitless, mine will be the trespass. Is it not dreadful for a mother to say so? Some women are good and brave, at least for their children; but I—sometimes I dare not think of it—I have sacrificed him to myself. The choice lay clearly before me, and I stretched out my hand for myself.’

‘But why suppose that you have deprived him of anything,’ said Clare. ‘He is admirably suited to his position. If he had gone into the world, it by no

means necessarily follows that his life would have been fruitful. Hundreds, situated as he would have been, have proved more than the mere opposite of fruitful. Think of that aspect at least, Mrs. Whinstone.'

' You tempt me, my dear,' said the old lady, smiling. ' I will plead no shadow of extenuation. My motive was only selfish, and I should but add to my wrong if I endeavoured to disguise it. But I have been mercifully treated, for my boy, I am sure, is good. How different he might have been! But what a tiresome old woman I am,' she continued, more cheerfully. ' I did not entice you here in order to draw you into all my melancholy secrets. Let us get Margaret to sing to us.'

Paul's favourable construction of the

general position of affairs has already been alluded to. It received confirmation with the evening's advancement, so that he steadily rose to a point of confident exhilaration. Clare's graciousness to himself was not all. He attached even more significance to her marked kindness towards his mother. In the sanguine mood to which he had worked himself, it appeared nothing short of a delicate expression of the young lady's approval of himself and his advances. She was hardly likely to love his mother, and above all to make an open display of such affection, if it was her intention to treat himself with disdain. Thus much appeared to him comfortably certain.

From this perception, Paul was led rapidly onwards. He had, from the outset, been desirous of threshing out with

her the subject of the portrait; now he was distinctly resolved upon doing so. There was nothing like a favourable present. To this end were all his efforts now directed. It could not be done in public, at least not with anything approaching a satisfactory thoroughness; therefore a private interview must be compassed, and that without delay, for the time drew on. This chance came opportunely to his assistance.

As Clare settled down at the piano to accompany the song, Paul spoke quietly to the vicar.

‘Keep my mother’s attention for a quarter-of-an-hour, Mr. Crook.’

The clergyman nodded and understood.

The minute before, Paul had whispered to his sister,

‘When I go, bring Miss Langtoft into

the library. Don't leave us too abruptly.'

Such a device suited Margaret exactly, in spite of her distaste for one of the parties to it. As she was debarred from playing a game herself, the next best thing was to take a part in the game of another; but she thought bitterly on the absent Kidland.

When the song was over, Paul approached the piano with some general remark upon the music. Clare wheeled round to him, and looked up benignly, ignoring the critical value of the comment. She replied to it with all sobriety, and the conversation was opened. General conventionalities were complied with, and the vicar and Mrs. Monk closed in upon the hostess.

'But some of the sweetest music has

arisen from popular sources,' said Clare, in reply to some disparaging remark from her companion. 'Look at the popular songs of any nationality, notably that of our own Scotland.'

'Ha, well, yes,' said Paul; 'the old ones.'

'The highest and the lowest frequently meet in the sphere of art; and of course it is with no sense of disparagement that we perceive the lowest to be an unconscious outcome. The term is rather the result of human arrogance.'

'Like the singing of birds, for instance,' remarked Paul, with a smile of diffidence.

'Precisely. One's appreciation and delight is none the less. When I stand in the twilight to listen to a nightingale, my feelings are very much the same as those

with which I hear a great human singer or musician.'

'I wish I could hear a nightingale,' interposed Margaret. 'Do you get them here, Paul?'

'No.' Paul was looking at the piano thoughtfully.

'Aren't yours, Mr. Whinstone?'

'I don't quite know,' he replied, with unwavering honesty.

'Pray do not be so serious about it,' said Clare, laughing good-naturedly. 'Do not think it is a desirable blessing to be conscious of the quality of your feelings. Mr. Crook, you remember, calls it a modern disease, and you know that in most things he is right.'

'I hope he is in this,' returned Paul; 'but I have my doubts. I rather think that you yourself disprove it, Miss Lang-

toft. If you will excuse me, I shall say that all your possessions are on the side of health.'

'What awful dry-sticks,' thought Margaret. 'Is this how they are going to make love?'

'Your politeness deceives you,' said Clare.

'But we have left the point I commenced with,' said Paul, in an altered tone. 'I was talking of all ancient music, and not merely of the popular airs. The old church music, for instance—the monkish chants. It is queer old stuff. Would you like to see some, Miss Langtoft? There are two or three ancient manuscripts of it in the library which I discovered the other day. I will fetch them.'

Paul departed. He was absent for some

minutes, Clare and Margaret talking together the while; at length they also withdrew from the room.

Of course, Mr. Paul was on the point of issuing from the library as they entered with a folio under his arm, and was pleasantly surprised at their appearance. Margaret readily persuaded him to turn with them again, into the calm atmosphere of the books.

For a short time they examined the monkish manuscripts with genuine interest, Clare becoming quite absorbed in their antiquarian fascinations, and wholly forgetful of the object of her presence there. When she raised her face casually from the pages, she perceived that Paul alone was standing beside her, and a slight tremulousness passed over her. She turn-

ed again to the discoloured old vellum on the table.

'I am afraid you did not altogether enjoy the day yesterday, Miss Langtoft,' said Paul over her head, with startling abruptness.

'What can possibly have led you to think so?' she replied, looking instantly up at him.

'Oh, that unfortunate incident with the sketch. I am awfully grieved that it should have happened, and I do hope you will forgive me. I never thought of it in that light.'

Clare laughed.

'Do not be troubled about that. It was part of the fun of the day, and let us forget all about it.'

'Forget!' he exclaimed, in a tone of

ardent desperation. ‘I should be sorry to forget all about it. I am glad to say that I cannot. The day is one for me to remember.’

‘I am glad that you enjoyed it so much.’

‘I enjoyed it more than I can tell you. I might say that I had never seen the country before to enjoy it, for everything around me looked fresh. Something changed the whole aspect of it. I wish I could see everything as you see it. All my life would be so different; so much more interesting.’

‘I am afraid you would very soon regret the exchange,’ said Clare, lightly, rising from her chair.

Paul shook his head.

‘Will you give me that drawing, Miss Langtoft?’

'I had better not.'

'I should prize it very much, if only as a memento of one happy day.'

'Choose some other more worthy memorial, Mr. Whinstone.'

'I judge its worth by the value of what it represents, and by that it is priceless. There would be only one memorial more worthy. That I dare not hope for.'

'I am not sure that I understand you,' replied Clare; 'but I am afraid that it may have some complimentary reference to myself. I do not like compliments. Shall we return to the drawing-room?'

'Not yet, Miss Langtoft,' said Paul, more fervently, but with the slightest suggestion of despair. 'I do not pretend that I am worthy even of your picture, but will you give me it that I may try to become so? Such a face might ennable

the most worthless of men, and that I know I am not. You will not deny me its influence. Do not, Miss Langtoft, I beseech you. Leave me one ray of hope to live by. With it I can go forward. I am sure I can. This is all I have wanted to help me. I will study; indeed I will. I am young, and with your help may do very much. Will you give me this help?"

There was a glow of sincerity about the fellow in his ardour, and it smote Clare.

'It pains me to hear you say this, Mr. Whinstone, for it only admits of one construction. You greatly exaggerate my paltry qualifications; but, if indeed I had them, I should only deceive you by placing them at your service. We are no longer children, and intercourse of such a kind would only be embarrassing.'

'It—it need not be embarrassing. Of

course to do it merely as friends would be impossible, but may I never hope for another position? May I not hope to become something to you at last? When I have worked and shown you what I can do? Do not judge me by what I appear now.'

'Mr. Whinstone, I shall appear harsh and unfeeling to you, but in such a matter I dare not for a moment deceive you. In the sense in which you mean it, we can never be anything to each other. I beg you to accept that as irrevocable. You know the inexplicable mystery of these feelings. They will not be directed. You feel it now, for your nature is sincere; but try to regard it from a wider standpoint. Every man of generous feeling has to encounter this possibly more than once in his youth. His manhood is shown in

the way he receives it. Now look at the merely practical aspects of it. I am, I believe, at least two years older than you. For fully five years to come you would do yourself an irreparable injury by tying yourself to any woman,—by then I shall be all but a woman of thirty !'

' Miss Langtoft, do you think that five years can in any way affect my feeling for you, except by strengthening it? No time can affect it: I know it can't. Do you think I should no longer love you as a woman of thirty ?'

' I sincerely hope so——'

Paul started suddenly at a sound in the hall.

' It is my father,' he said, quickly. ' Let us talk about it again.'

' Never again, please,' she replied, with emphasis.

And Margaret came forward into the library, followed by two elderly gentlemen.

This young lady had been descending the stairs jauntily, dwelling upon the stately proportions of the mansion, and assuming what seemed to herself an attitude befitting the situation. The glory of the thing had not as yet lost any of its glamour. When she was alone she would still indulge in stimulating visions with tremulous glee. She would summon imperiously before her a far-off scene, where lay vividly depicted a modestly respectable interior in the heart of a provincial town. It was market day, perhaps, and raining. In a chair drawn close to the window,—an upper window with a shop beneath,—sat a maiden gazing into the busy street with a dark and

critical eye. A carriage and pair rolled past with perhaps a magistrate, or a lady, within, and the dark eyes were instantly aglow until it was out of sight: then the maiden would seem to sigh. Something like this would Margaret recall, if only for the malicious pleasure of exposing it to the glare of something different,—of holding it right in the blaze to be charred there for her triumphantly to trample and to spit upon the ashes.

In some such exultant mood, Margaret had been descending the spacious staircase. When she came in view of the hall below she saw figures there, and heard their footsteps. To her surprise her father's face became visible, and he beckoned her to him.

‘We never expected you to-night,’ she

said, running down to kiss him, until checked by his glance.

‘ You have company,’ he said. ‘ We won’t disturb you. Come into the library, Mr. Cathcart.’

‘ One minute, father: Paul is there.’

The gentleman frowned, but allowed his daughter to precede him.

Paul offered his hand to his father, and to the other visitor. The gentlemen bowed to Miss Langtoft.

‘ Will you stay a few minutes with us, Paul?’ said Mr. Whinstone, walking to the fire.

Margaret and Clare accepted the intimation, and withdrew.

It was scarcely half-an-hour later when Mrs. Monk’s carriage arrived. Although the

gentlemen had declined by their presence to interrupt them, the announcement of their arrival naturally caused some break in the conversation. Mrs. Whinstone immediately fidgeted and inquired for Paul. Mrs. Monk glanced with interest from one to the other, and asked Margaret if her father was not going to join them. She expressed disappointment at a negative.

The time was passed until the carriage arrived, but nobody seemed particularly sorry when it came.

Paul was detained in the library. Suddenly he had been whirled from the realm of love and romance to the chill, practical atmosphere of nineteenth century electioneering; and possibly he found the abrupt transposition somewhat disconcerting. The visitor who accompanied

Mr. Whinstone was his political agent, a lawyer of the neighbourhood, and the two callous men of business were intent upon turning to practical account Paul's intimate knowledge of the locality. Local chairmen for the minor meetings ; available local talent for the vernacular exposition of their programme ; volunteer vehicles for the polling day : these, and various other equally important minutiae, whistled around the ears of Paul in such exasperating confusion that all knowledge, local or other, seemed wholly to have left him. His indifference and apparent preoccupation served only to irritate his father.

Paul heard the footsteps and voices in the hall with perfect distinctness, and could have detailed quite accurately to his persecutors every movement which was there proceeding, if they could only have

made some practical use of it. But what cared they for the divine accents of a woman's voice, or the divine sentiments which, in any generous spirit, they evoked,—these cold, insensate wretches? What was the music of that sacred tongue,—musical and sacred still, although it seemed to have tolled the knell of individual aspirations; what was it to this empty, pitiless world? Or even that other voice, ringing distinctly out that moment, and itself by association sacred also,—what was—

The young man looked at his father in his exasperation, and suddenly checked the torrent of his reflections. Surely he was not so indifferent as his victim had adjudged him.

'Whose voice was that?' said Mr.

Whinstone, as his son's eye was turned upon him.

'Mrs. Monk's,' replied Paul, and could scarce restrain a yell of triumph.

Even these creatures could be conquered. The voice was heard again, as if speaking aloud to somebody up the stairs.

'It is quite dark and windy. Never mind to-night.'

'Mrs. Monk's? Who is Mrs. Monk?' asked the elder, savagely. 'It can't be,' he added, and jumped from his chair.

The gentleman thrust his head unceremoniously through the doorway, but only a gust of cold night air met him, and only the backs of the ladies were visible as they were leaving the house.

Mr. Whinstone returned, smiling.

'Cathcart, this business will turn my head. I thought that was the voice of a lady I left in London. Come, let us get on.'

And in the stress of practical employment the incident was forgotten.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE DALE.

THE earth rejoiced in the morning sunlight, after the drenching rain of the previous day. Through an atmosphere of marvellous clearness and tone came the few characteristic sounds which give individual life to the silent hills, and Hugh Winlaw heard them all and was glad. He was gathering his sheep on the heathery slope beneath the Corbie's Cairn, and from the height of his fourteen hundred feet he looked abroad with a certain sense of pre-

eminence over the majority of his fellow-men.

Of intelligent beings, he and his dog were there alone, with the passive flock between them. Above the plaintive, inarticulate bleating of the throng came the resonant dialogue of these two leaders, both of whom seemed to put into their accents much of the masterful exhilaration of which their position made them conscious.

A stiff north-west wind was rushing over the hills, visibly rippling the wide sea of heath, whose face already showed the delicate tint of its maturer hue. On the deep blue space above were only some compact slips of clouds lingering about the horizon, of which one solid bar had risen athwart the sun, and momentarily intercepted its rays, which were thrown on

to the long-drawn streaks beneath, transforming them to reaches of silver sand. High over the shepherd's head, intent upon watching the scene below, hovered a couple of kestrels, with their faces to the wind, and their plumage richly brown in the early sunlight.

Winlaw, I say, saw and heard it all, and was glad.

The shepherd had gone through some momentous experiences during the last few days. Mrs. Monk's words had stirred him; but an influence of even greater potency than these sprang from the positive intercourse which had been afforded him with a world wholly different from his own. Vaguely he had dreamed of such a world, but never before had he actually touched it. Impressions springing merely from imaginary premises lack

the depth of actual experience. He had seen such people from his earliest days, had perhaps speculated upon some of the phases of their existence; from the point of view of mere personal juxtaposition and interchange of speech had frequently held intercourse with them; but all such had hitherto only impressed upon him the *material* distinctions of cash. Of late he had been permitted a glimpse of something altogether beyond this.

Hugh had gathered his sheep and had done with them. At a particular movement of the head, and an imperative ejaculation, ‘Luath, come by here!’ the dog skirted the circular flock between them, and drew up to his master’s heel. They both ascended the slope in the direction of the cairn.

The wind whistled round the rugged

heap of stones at the summit, and for a short time the shepherd stood with his face towards the breeze, his hand raised to his cap to secure it, and his eyes cast upon the wide prospect around. Afterwards he moved to leeward, and, by altering the position of one or two of the fragments, he made a convenient resting-place for himself under shelter of the pile. He drew a paper from his pocket, and opened it out before him. The dog lay down at his feet.

It was the spacious columns of the *Times* that he was reading. Every night now he fetched from the Peel the copy of the previous day, such being Mrs. Monk's directions, and his own prompt acquiescence therein. This lady's recent tactics had aroused the curiosity of Clare, and she had openly broached the subject of

her thoughts. The interview of Hugh with her aunt had not been specifically discussed between them. However, as a trivial outcome of that interview, Winlaw had written his essay upon a sheep, and this production had been handed to Clare. It was in connection with it that the young lady had hazarded her comment.

'Yes, it is passable,' she said, when her aunt questioned her about it; 'but I do not discern obvious signs of genius in it.'

'That is more than probable, my dear. Limit your expectations in the matter of genius at the present time. Look for competence, if you like, but let us place the greater quality out of our consideration. It is part of what you call my cynical creed to suspect that, by our unreasoning greed for competence, we are

scientifically exterminating genius from amongst us. But that is beside the question. This is better than I expected, Clare.'

'I don't think I can say that it is better than I expected.'

'There are distinctly noticeable points about it. There is a force of style not common, and unquestionable imagination. It is by no means everybody that can give you in good, or even coherent English, a simple account of what they do every day of their lives. It may seem astonishing that they can't, but the fact remains. Hugh does more than this. There is much of the artist about him,' continued the lady, looking out wistfully at the prospect. 'Some of his descriptions are excellent. The opening picture of the April folding of the ewes and the birth

of the lambs is good ; quite clear though too brief, naturally. You would hardly expect maturity of proportion, at first. The “louping” at the burn preparatory to shearing is to me admirable ; shows an eye for the requisite strokes to the exclusion of superfluities. Now, at the close, he distinctly betrays a delicacy of imagination. I told him to end the scene in the shambles ; he prefers to kill picturesquely in that blinding snow-storm in the linn. Say what you will, Clare, as a whole it is surprisingly good ’

‘ My dear aunt, do you think I wish to deprecate it ? It is only that, from my high opinion of the fellow, I expected even better than this. No doubt I am unreasonable. Remember, what you have often pointed out to me, the difficulty of a judicial attitude in a young person. We

have too much of your much be-scorned enthusiasm. But may I ask the motive of this special treatment of Hugh ?'

Mrs. Monk shrugged her shoulders.

' My own amusement.'

' You are not so inhuman,' replied Clare. ' But, without joking, I thought you objected to disproportionate education in people of this station ? Are your views altered ?'

' Station—bah ! This man Winlaw belongs to no station, as you call it. Don't turn Philistine, Clare. I cannot injure him by experimenting.'

' Newspaper reading and electioneering : do you want to mould him into a mere journalist or stump orator ? I should suggest that an indifferent shepherd were a preferable person.'

' People mould themselves, Clare. Hugh

has an idea that the crook is not his suitable weapon, hence he appears to sit down in the conclusion that the world does not contain his suitable weapon. I only want to give him one or two on which he may try his muscle. Mere dumb-bell exercise is beneficial, although you do not turn a windmill by the exertion.'

'Perhaps there is something in what you say.'

'I am infinitely obliged to your ladyship.'

Hugh waded patiently—no, zealously,—through his newspaper, jotting down thoughts from time to time, as they occurred to him, in a small, black-backed memorandum-book which he held in his hand. Occasionally he would audibly ejaculate some word of approbation or

dissent, but it was only his dog that looked up at him. The man personally entered into all that he was reading about, in a manner which had long been strange to him. Of late years he had allowed himself to drift into a quasi-philosophical lethargy and cynicism with regard to the active march of the world. Upon the rare occasion of a visit to some centre of our human delirium, he was for a moment inordinately stirred, and would long to lay his hand to the very pivot of the world ; but a sense of powerlessness would suddenly curb him, and again he would withdraw to the seclusion of his mountains, there to indulge, under such limitations as were inevitable, the negative philosophy, ' Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die.'

Towards mid-day he was at home to

have dinner with his sister. Naturally, nobody had benefited so much by the alteration in his outlook as his companion, Maisie. He now regularly conversed with her, voluntarily and with animation, so that not only were her thoughts about him revolutionized, but her world became incalculably widened, and her interest in life correspondingly enlarged. Hugh was, to-day, full of the Radical meeting of the evening, for it marked the commencement of his campaign, and he felt in full equipment for the fray.

‘But you won’t interrupt them in their meeting?’ suggested Maisie, in reply to some sweeping assertion from her brother.

‘Of course not, my lass. They’re all entitled to their hearing. But it’s hard to keep patience with them.’

'That's what they think of you,' remarked his sister, drily.

'Of course it is, and that's just what makes politics such a ridiculous thing to handle. You canna argue about them. One man sees blue, and another yellow, and no power of words can mak 'em see different. You have no common ground to stand upon. It's nothing less than one kind of animal against another, as different altogether as a dog and a cat. You may easily enough make 'em vote differently from time to time, of course, but it's no conviction of the mind that guides them. It's just a question of some cry you can get up that seems to affect their interests one way or the other. They talk about the science of politics; but, if other sciences were handled like this one, they wouldna get much harvest out of them.'

'Don't quarrel with George,' said Maisie some minutes later.

'I'll not quarrel with the fellow,' replied Hugh, glancing at her down-turned face; 'if only for your sake, Maisie.'

She raised her eyes quickly, and reddened.

'That is not why I ask,' she said. 'My thoughts are not changed, Hugh. I shall never marry him, and I told him so again the other day. I wanted to tell you about it.'

'He's very fond of you, my lass.'

'Yes, I know he is,' replied Maisie, a little impatiently. 'But I canna help it. I don't care for him a bit.'

'I'm glad of it,' said her brother, and turned off to another subject.

After dinner Hugh departed. He had to go to an outlying portion of his terri-

tory, and, as it lay in the neighbourhood of Isaac Outchester's dwelling, he determined to have tea with the old man, and accompany him to the meeting. This arrangement he carried out.

Isaac was in the act of shaving outside his doorway upon Hugh's arrival. The little looking-glass was hung upon a nail in the wall upon a level with his face, and the soap and hot water—the latter in an old preserved beef-tin—lay on the windowsill beside him. It was by the reflection in the glass that Isaac was warned of his friend's approach, and, without turning from his occupation, he offered him his greeting.

'We'se hae a braw night, Hughie,' came from a mouth awry amidst an expanse of soap. 'The lads 'ull be doon i' numbers.'

‘I expect so,’ was the mild reply. ‘Ye’ll be gaun likely.’

‘Ou, ay, man. But I dinna think much o’ thae meetings, ye ken. There’s ower mony words to the sense ahint ’em. “The heart of fools is in their mouth,” ye ken; “but the mouth of the wise is in their heart.”’

Hugh perceived his friend’s mood, and smiled inwardly.

‘Ye’ll no be for speaking?’ asked Isaac.

‘No, no.’

Then they were silent, the scraping of the razor being all that was audible.

‘Why will ye no gie your mind til’t, Hughie?’ said the old man, presently. ‘Ye hae the learnin’, look you. Ye might publish it to the world.’

‘The prophetic revelation, do you mean?’

‘Ay, ay, the varry self and same.
That’s just what ye may ca’ it.’

‘It needs more than the learning to get hold of it, Isaac,’ replied Hugh, dissembling.

‘I do believe sae,’ said the old man, shaking his head. ‘Nane o’ the ministers wha I hae talked to about it can make head or tail of it. It’s clean beyond them entirely a’thegither. It’s a gift, ye ken; it’s a gift.’

After a quantity of similar discourse before and over a frugal meal, the two men found themselves on the way to the political rendezvous. The place appointed for the meeting was a small school-room built beside a remote farm-house, in the upper part of the main dale of the locality, for the convenience of the sparse and scattered population of the hills. To it chil-

dren of the shepherds walked for several miles, when not prevented by the winter snowfall. In addition, it served other local purposes upon occasion. A religious service was sometimes held there, or a modest lecture or entertainment at more uncertain intervals. At length even its turn came for political propagandism, and in this capacity it would attract at least as many of its neighbours as it ever did for its other and perhaps more legitimate purposes.

Each tract of moorland for a few miles around had its one or more solitary figure trudging silently over it, with face bent towards this centre of attraction. The day had been a hot and sunny one, and now between six and seven in the evening the air was still close, although the orb,

high in the north-west, was getting bedimmed in a gathering haze.

Amongst the earliest to arrive were Hugh Winlaw and his companion, but amongst the few already assembled George Rutherford was conspicuous.

‘He’s having his turn already,’ remarked Hugh, smiling, as he and Isaac descended into the valley.

‘Tarr’ble hand for the speaking,’ said the other.

Three young fellows were standing upon the foot-bridge over the mountain river, looking down into the water, and Rutherford was one of them. He was soon seen to be engaged in animated discourse, but upon Hugh’s approach he became silent. All exchanged a friendly greeting.

Those assembled stood about in twos

and threes, conversing amicably. From the jocular banter with which Hugh was on all hands received, it appeared as though his opinions were distinctly in the minority. Politics notwithstanding, he was a universal favourite, and nobody seemed willing to assume towards him any but a cordial bearing. One or two elderly farmers received him with an obviously awkward kindness, as if they were in some doubt as to the attitude expected of them. They were, in fact, old friends of his family, and they had not personally encountered him since, what appeared to them, the crippling turn in his affairs. Hugh's own behaviour soon settled the question for them, and put them immediately at their ease.

There must have been about thirty of them gathered there, when a general

murmur of expectation became audible. Seven o'clock was the time announced for the opening of the meeting, and it was already several minutes past that hour. Two or three names of importance locally had been mentioned in the bills as having promised to be present to support the imposing stranger (no doubt by profession an itinerant spokesman), whose address was meant to be the centre of attraction, and who was described with such impressive vagueness as 'of London' generally. None of these had as yet appeared.

But the countrymen were not to be altogether disappointed. Presently a dog-cart was sighted containing four figures in black, and in due course it reached them. The London gentleman, at any rate, was true to them, so that they could depend upon receiving an able exposition of

metropolitan politics literally at first hand. The three gentlemen who accompanied him were no doubt of importance in their particular way, but some present did feel that they were not exactly the gentlemen they had looked forward to seeing here. As a matter of fact, two of them were junior clerks in the establishment of the solicitor who was agent for the liberal candidate; and the third was a commercial-traveller picked up by the London emissary in the inn where he had obtained the gig. Even their expected chairman had failed them, so that a substitute had to be elected from the company assembled. This was promptly done, and the formalities began there in the open air.

It was only in degree that the meeting differed from a normal one of the kind. The ordinary topics were enlarged on in

the ordinary irresistible manner. To the speaker and his confederates had the keys of paradise been entrusted ; to his opponents the keys and inheritance only of another place. Circumstantial demonstration followed the assertion.

All listened with exemplary patience ; two only demand our closer attention. The speaker stood in the doorway to address them, to his right by the corner of the building was a mountain ash-tree, and against the trunk of it an earnest-faced man was leaning. His features displayed little of the impression which he received from the words, but at any remark of what we may call a socialistic tendency he audibly expressed his approbation. Hugh Winlaw was not far from him, and it was noticeable that the eyes of each were frequently turned upon the other. Hugh

appeared good-tempered enough, if somewhat supercilious in his attitude. This latter perhaps arose from a consciousness of his wider surroundings. He was seen occasionally to move his eyes from the immediate circle to the hills and the sky above.

Above the resonant voice of the speaker, and the babble of the water near at hand, sometimes came the call of a distant curlew, audible perhaps to him alone, and this would subtly suggest to him a reflection which contrasted forcibly with the general current of his thoughts. Did Rutherford perceive this, and unfavourably construe it? He showed a constant unwillingness to encounter the full glance of Winlaw.

Each, at least, was conscious of the curiosity of the other; their movements

bore unmistakable evidence of so much. It was not until the conclusion of the meeting, however, that they interchanged either a word or look of conscious communion.

A bat was already fluttering round the building before the original speaker brought his harangue to a close. When his fervid peroration had died away in a moment of intensest silence, applause broke forth. This was followed by the customary appeal for questions. Only one man availed himself of the opportunity, and this was he who stood against the rowan-tree,—George Rutherford by name. He did not repeat the experiment. The reply had been a jocose one, and the questioner was in no mood for jocularity. He turned away, and after the concluding formalities the meeting was over.

'Are you going, George?' asked Hugh, as the other passed near him.

He muttered an affirmative, and Winlaw followed him.

Rutherford's conduct was surprising to his comrades. It had been fully expected that he would at least address the meeting. Many who were staying for subsequent discussion called after him, but he merely shouted a good-night and continued on his way. As Hugh got up to him, the dog-cart containing the august emissaries passed them, and the driver looked down at them.

'Good-night,' he said. 'Bring 'em all up to the poll.'

'Go to hell,' replied Rutherford, with astonishing frankness, and Hugh burst into unrestrained laughter.

'They've done some good, at any rate, George,' he remarked, jocosely; but there was no reply.

'That fellow is half-drunk,' said Rutherford, some seconds later.

'Certainly. I saw that at the beginning.'

'Is he paid for coming here?'

'I expect so. That Tory fellow was paid that came to Feldom in the winter. In fact, this fellow was not at all unlike the same man, was he?'

Rutherford smiled grimly.

'Why didna you speak, George?'

'I'll no speak before the like o' them,' was the savage answer. 'No wonder we canna get what we want, when such as they do the asking for us. They'll just say what they are paid to say, but they dinna care a d—— for us at the hinder

end. Words are nae use at all. The French fellows showed us how to do it, but we're a poor scarry lot.'

' Isaac told you the other day that you'd be fighting, George, but you laughed at him. He's not so far wrong, after all, it seems.'

' Daur say no,' replied Rutherford, sullenly.

' You've only to start, man. We're ready to take you in a fair fight any day,' said Hugh, more warmly; ' or an unfair one for a matter o' that, for you wouldna give us much else, I'll warrant.'

' What for do you gan along with them, Hugh?'

' I've told you many a time. It's nae use arguing with you.'

For some distance they walked on together in silence. The twilight was deepen-

ing, and with it the sky was growing clearer, so that a star or two already appeared. Hugh observed that, despite the hour, his companion was proceeding with a complete disregard of his homeward course, but he did not at first pass any comment upon it. He was too much engaged with the singular phase of feeling that throughout the evening Rutherford had displayed. The man's humours were not unknown to Hugh, but he had hitherto regarded them as the outcome of a very common superficial discontent, of but little serious significance in itself and likely to be outgrown in a year or two's time. Tonight Winlaw had somewhat modified his opinion.

Perhaps the particular symptom which led him to this conclusion was the man's obviously savage reticence which contrast-

ed so markedly with the outspoken blustering of his general anger.

'What have you been looking so savagely at me for all the evening?' asked Hugh at length, after the question had played several times about his tongue.

Rutherford looked up quickly from a reverie.

'Because you are a traitor, man.'

Hugh laughed.

'Dinna be such a fool, George. What days do you think you're living in?'

'It's no me that's the fool, as you'll find out some day. Are you content to be a servant a' your days that they may live in idleness and luxury? They're just bribing you, man, to shut your mouth and keep you friendly; but it's only a traitor that 'ud tak their bait. I didna think you'd be one, anyhow.'

'I'm not going to quarrel with you,' replied Hugh. 'You are talking a lot of stupid nonsense, as you'll see to-morrow. Get away hame, man, and have some whisky and get to bed.'

'I want to talk to you first. What for hae you set Maisie against me?'

'Oh, that's what's wrang wi' you, is it? Then I can tell you that, until to-day, I didn't know that she was against you. I have never said a word about you to her in all my life. The lass kens nicely how to look after herself, and she'll get no interference from me, whatever way she likes to look. If you can get her, man, have her and welcome; but, if you cannot, don't squawl out about it like a fractious bairn.'

A short silence followed, after which

Hugh made another effort to get rid of his companion.

'How much farther are you going?' he asked. 'You'll no get hame the night.'

'I'll gan a bit further. I like to talk to you. Will you tell me who it is that Maisie's in love with?'

'I dinna ken anything about her affairs, I tell you. She never talks to me about 'em. But, if she'll no have you, what is it to you who else she'll have?'

They talked on in this disjointed way, first of one grievance, then of the other, and all Hugh's efforts to throw off his companion were fruitless. After a time, he naturally suspected his intentions. For a moment he thought of openly thwarting them, but he relented, and permitted the man to proceed with him. For more than an hour they had been walking, until,

upon surmounting a ridge, the light at Braidstruther appeared across the obscure expanse of moorland before them.

As the two entered the house, Maisie heard the double footsteps and started. Without an instant's reflection, she rose from her chair, and, with a rapid movement, leaned across the table to snatch up a folded paper which was lying there. As she drew her hand quickly towards her, Rutherford was already in the doorway, and she perceived that her action had been noticed.

'Come in!' she cried, endeavouring to pass off, with a frown, a slight trace of confusion; the paper still openly clutched in her hand. 'You gave me a fright, for I didna hear you approaching. Is Hugh there?'

'Ay, ay, lass,' was the reply, accompanied by a sinister glance of suspicion.
'I'm sorry to frighten you.'

Hugh then also came forward. From a blush his sister's face had changed to an unusual pallor, and he noticed the peculiarity of her attitude. He looked at Rutherford, and felt angry at having permitted the fellow to enter.

'Here's a note for you, Hugh,' she said, holding out her hand.

He took it, glanced carelessly at the exterior, and then thrust it in his pocket.

Maisie quickly added another plate to the supper-table, and presently the three of them were seated.

CHAPTER VII.

PAUL'S COMMUNICATION.

PAUL WHINSTONE was of a temperament sufficiently robust to enable him to discern that in action alone lay the palliative to mental disquietude. When the voices of those disturbing visitors had died away, and his father was once more seated in his chair in the library, the young man made an effort to control his rebellious thoughts, and to subdue them definitely to the practical matter before him. There was consequently an impetuosity in his

manner which, no doubt, was quite as obvious to his observant father as the former pre-occupation had been; but as the result was more favourable to himself, he did not betray any mental comment upon it.

It was long after midnight when the three separated, and, upon Paul's coming down to a late breakfast the following morning, he learned that the other two had already departed. He himself had been lying awake for three hours previous to rising, and now that he was up he perceived that all the wholesome power of rebellion, upon which he had been building so largely, had abandoned him, leaving him a prey to the gloomiest irresolution. A cup of coffee and a fragment of dry toast broke his fast sufficiently, and then he withdrew to the solitude of the library.

In this, no doubt, he betrayed a weak disloyalty to his better judgment. For a long time he reclined indolently in a chair, smoking. His eyes were fixed upon the table, and there he saw again, vividly presented, the scene of last evening: he continued to stare at it. At length he rose, went to the table, and leaned over it. There lay the old illuminated manuscript, open as she had left it, at the very page upon which her white hand had rested. Paul laid down his own palm upon the place that hers had sanctified.

By lunch-time he was hungry, and he drank more wine at the meal than was his custom. Consequently, he rose in a state of exhilaration, fully prepared to engage vigorously with more than one universe, if such should show the inclination to oppose him. Margaret, therefore, found

him better company. To her he had dissembled, and she remained under the impression that her father's arrival the previous night had checked the interesting proceedings at a point short of an actual conclusion. Naturally, she was indignant and sympathetic.

But she was unable to detain him. The only effectual treatment for such a disquieting affection seemed to her to lie in a drive over the hills to Kidland Castle ; but Paul had thought otherwise. With his restoration to independence, his political ardour was revived, and he resolved upon a consultation with Hugh Winlaw, in view of the radical meeting which was to be held that night in the upper dale. In the course of the afternoon, therefore, he was mounted and riding outwards to the moor.

The suggestions of the journey were not so engrossingly political as he had expected them to be. Associations of a different nature arose frequently upon the road, and presented themselves with a distinctness so alluring, that once Paul had actually turned his horse from the homestead track towards the hollow furrowing the open moorland, which he knew to mark the Braidstruther burn. But he soon again turned, and went forwards to the house. For the last mile he cantered, and, as he drew up his horse suddenly before the window of the dwelling, he saw Maisie Winlaw gazing out from it. At the instant she withdrew, and, by the time Paul had leaped from his saddle, the door was opened from within. He smiled at her, and politely touched his hat.

‘ Hugh about, Miss Winlaw?’

‘No, sir, he isn’t. He went over to the Whaup High Moss after dinner, and he said that he should go on to Windyhaugh without coming back.’

‘Oh, what a pity. I wanted to speak to him about the meeting to-night. He means to go there?’

‘Yes, sir, certainly.’

Maisie smiled significantly as she gave her answer.

‘You think he enjoys it too much to miss it?’ suggested Paul, jocularly.

‘I think so.’

‘Oh, well, it is of no great importance,’ said Paul, looking into the girl’s face as he lifted his foot to the stirrup. ‘I will ride over in the morning to see him. Will you ask him to stay near home?’

‘But I am sorry, too,’ he continued, reflectively, after a pause, looking at his

foot, which was placed in the stirrup. ‘I forgot I shall not be at home to-morrow.’ Then, more decidedly, ‘Will you let me write a note for him?’

‘Oh, certainly, sir. Will you come in?’

Paul fastened his horse and entered. He had not been impressed before by the urgency of his communication, and he once more hesitated upon the threshold, as if in doubt as to the necessity of this course; but political ardour decided him, and he followed Maisie into the parlour. She placed paper and ink upon the table, and as he thanked her she withdrew.

‘I shall only be a minute or two,’ he said, as she closed the door behind her.

When Paul was alone, he took up the pen in a most business-like manner, and dipped it deeply into the ink. He wrote rapidly, ‘Dear Mai—’ then, with an ex-

clamation of impatience, he crumpled up the paper and thrust it into his pocket. He took a new sheet and wrote, ‘Dear Hugh;’ then he paused, with the tip of the wooden penholder against his lips. Paul could write rapidly enough if he had anything to say,—to ask Kidland or Selby, for instance, to come over without fail to dinner, or to meet him at some definite point ; but, if he had not anything to say, composition became altogether a different matter. Upon confronting this clean sheet of paper, he discovered unexpectedly that this latter was his condition at the present moment. Not a word of any kind would come. He looked in perplexity about the room, fixing his eyes ultimately upon the door. But inspiration came neither from the east nor from the west. Wherever he looked, in fact, or

upon whatever topic he tried to think, he could see nothing but a face of exquisite beauty, as it appeared to him, and in which were strangely blended the features of his own beloved Clare, and of another whom he had seen more recently than her. All his sentimental disquietude was again upon him.

He arose from his chair, and walked quietly about. To himself he admitted that he hardly knew what he was doing here. So far as he could trace through the confusion of his ideas, it was Maisie's face which had brought about the mischief. She was pretty, and had not unnaturally reminded him of woman, hence of the vexatious, though alluring fact that he himself was in love with one. He wanted hard, practical men to converse with now, as he had fully recognised before starting,

and for which purpose alone he had ridden to this place. No doubt he was not the first man to find at the extremity of a journey something diametrically opposite to his object in undertaking it.

With reflection, however, came submission ; and ultimately even more than this. Clearly he perceived that he had not come in to write an urgent message for Hugh. Literally he had not one word to say to him. It was Maisie's face that he wanted to look at, for it reminded him of Clare. With such suggestion how could he do otherwise than linger by it? Why on earth should he disguise the fact ? Love, he found, imparted to him an abstract tenderness for all womanhood, and, under a sense of depression consequent upon repulse, he found the sentiment peculiarly irresistible.

Having thus far sifted matters, Paul sat once again at the table, and this time found his ideas marvellously clearer. He scribbled on the paper much of what he had heard discussed in the library last night, and concluded with a request that Hugh would call at the Hall when he was down in the village. This appeared the best way out of the difficulty, and he opened the door loudly with a sense of satisfaction. He saw Maisie in the kitchen opposite, and he went in to her.

'I'll leave this, Miss Winlaw, if you will please to give it to Hugh. Oh, I'm afraid I interrupted you. You were having tea when I came?' he said, looking at the things laid upon the table. 'I wish you would give me a cup.'

She looked at him with an incredulous smile.

'Yes, really, I mean it. Would you mind?'

Maisie's answer was given in action. She got a cup for him, and he sat at a corner of the table. There was something so frank about him that she felt no awkwardness in the situation. Had it occurred but four days ago, her reception of it would no doubt have been different. Paul watched her quite freely, and he felt content. He basked fearlessly in her womanhood.

'Thank you very much,' he said, as she handed him his cup.

It must be remembered that Paul Whinstone was barely twenty-two. No doubt he was longing to make Maisie a confidante of all his woes,—at least, his sentimental ones; but, if the inclination assailed him, he succeeded in resisting it. He

made the young woman sit down and continue her tea, and he talked for a time of general matters. Maisie entered freely into his conversation.

It was only of late that Maisie had become conscious of a feeling which had long influenced her brother. She was now distinctly aware of a sense of pleasure in the refinements of Mr. Whinstone's speech and behaviour. As she spoke to him now, for instance, the thought of her pastoral suitor Rutherford, and his behaviour at the table a day or two ago, smote her with singular force. The contrast raised in her a positive feeling of repugnance towards the unpolished aspect of their rural existence. Singularly, at the moment of her feeling it, Paul made a remark of a cognate nature.

‘ It is natural, I suppose, that radicals

should be savage against us, but still I think it would be a poor world even for them without the refinements of existence. What I can't understand is a rich man, or a man of an old family, being a radical. It always looks to me like a fish trying to drain the water from the face of the earth. Don't you think so ?'

Mr. Whinstone's political foundation was naturally not of the deepest. Maisie laughed.

' Yes, it is strange,' she said.

' I don't want to favour any one class,' Paul continued. ' Everybody ought to be comfortable in this world, and, if I could make the laws, they should be. But I think this democracy the most ridiculous cry. Look what the ordinary lower classes are, you know, and just think of them having the management of the world ! I

don't like to think what would become of you and me, Miss Winlaw. They wouldn't try to make everybody comfortable—some they would do their best to make particularly uncomfortable. Do you know, Miss Winlaw,' continued Paul, with a burst of smiling confidence, 'I thought until the other day—really, I must beg your pardon for the thought,—but I thought, you know, that you hated people like us.'

Maisie reddened at the allusion, whether well or ill founded.

'I was quite sure, at any rate, that you disliked me personally, and I really didn't know how I had deserved it.'

Paul had made the remark more than half in jest, and was taken aback by her serious reception of it. She looked up at him with a heightened colour and quite a grave look in her expressive eyes.

'I did dislike you, sir, or I thought I did, for I knew nothing about you. I know now that it was not you that I disliked, but our own bad fortune. I was blinded by it.'

'Do not take me so seriously, Maisie,' replied he, pleased with that look she had given him. 'I was joking, really. You don't think I was offended, do you?'

'I think you ought to have been, sir.'

'Oh, dear, no! I understood it. I have no doubt I should have done just the same myself. But you are happier now, aren't you? Feeling more at home here?'

There was a paternal benignity in his tone which would not have disgraced the vicar himself.

'I am quite comfortable, thank you.'

But, naturally, I can hardly feel it home yet.'

'No, to be sure, not at first. Do, please, let us do what we can for you. If there is any alteration wanted, you know, or anything of that sort. It will really be a pleasure. My mother is especially anxious about you.'

Here Paul rose from his chair, at last conscious of the fact that he had been more than half-an-hour in the house. He lingered, standing, as if even yet unwilling to withdraw. He felt the atmosphere of the place congenial to him,—Maisie's voice was soft and womanly, and her glances of a gratifying friendliness;—despite the summer haze without it seemed rather chilly out there. In here warm, and a shelter from himself. Again he longed desperately to talk of Clare—just to get

Maisie to speak enthusiastically of her,—but again he resisted.

‘The quiet out here is delightful,’ he said, naïvely, holding the chair-back and looking towards the window. ‘It rests one so; it feels like another world. But I must go,’ he continued, turning slowly towards Maisie. ‘I have troubled you too long already. But you will excuse me. You understand us now.’

He took her hand kindly as he spoke, and looked at her. At the moment, he thought, ‘How awfully good that picture of Mr. Crook’s is! No wonder he is fond of her.’

‘Good-afternoon, sir.’

When he was gone, Maisie reseated herself at the table, poured out another cup of tea, and unfolded the sheet of paper

that he had left. There was nothing in its contents greatly to interest her, nevertheless she read it more than once. The mere handwriting perhaps was interesting as an example of how such people really did write. For a long time she continued silently to sit there, not examining the paper the whole time, but glancing at it occasionally as it lay in her lap, as if it was at any rate partially involved in the subject of her reverie.

When she rose from the table, there was a tinge of depression in her aspect, not unlike the one which Mr. Crook had detected in the encounter by the burn. There was nothing lackadaisical in the general mould of her features, so that an expression of pensiveness when present was especially noticeable and significant. She was rather deliberate in her move-

ments, too,—in tying on her white apron ; in washing up and drying her tea-things ; and in putting them away in their places. When at last it was done she went upstairs to her room.

Although this young woman did her own house-work, as well as such modest dairying as one cow entailed upon her, the afternoon always found her ‘dressed’ and at leisure. To-day had been no exception to the rule,—her appearance having been quite acceptable even to one of Mr. Paul Whinstone’s aristocratic sensibilities ;—nevertheless, now that she was alone, she seemed about to go again through the process of personal adornment.

She took off her gown, and, standing before the glass, unfolded her luxuriant hair, proceeding then to comb and to brush it at its full length. Its hue was brown,

and as the golden, hazy sunlight of evening smote the glistening surface the result was such as to raise a deep blush of pride to the young woman's face. She would pull a great sweep of the tresses forward over her shoulder and breast, and then draw the brush down it slowly from the top, watching intently the varying shade that played upon the surface. For a few moments her face was lit up with the old light of gladness, but presently it vanished, to be replaced by the cloud of dejection. These expressions were but the reflection of the active turmoil within. Her thoughts were restlessly surging.

'I can see nobody—nobody,' she thought at these clouded moments; 'and him I cannot love. He makes me shudder, and now I feel to hate him. The touch of his rough fingers makes me tremble,—yes, I

hate him. But he loves me—and nobody else does in all the world,—but one; and she smiled involuntarily. ‘Because I can see nobody. To live with him alone amongst these hills,—him in the morning, him at night. It would kill me. Yet Hugh is a shepherd; but he is so different. More like those others. How beautiful they are! Oh, if I had somebody that I might love! Somebody else *could* love me, I am *sure* they could. But I see nobody, and can love nobody, and never shall. How different the world must be! Somebody young, beautiful, and—and refined. How different the world would be!’

Women are foolish, vain, we say; and perhaps they are; but we do not dispose of them so. At times, at least, the world is not a chimera.

Maisie proceeded with her toilet,—coiling her lovely, glistening hair to the best of her ability,—decking herself out with every bit of finery in her possession. As she progressed, the effects pleased her, and she would laugh with gladness at the figure reflected there. But only in snatches and not for long.

‘Nobody can see me,’ was the recurring burden of her thought; ‘nobody that I can love.’

Clad again in her homely neatness, Maisie sat awaiting her brother. She was in a serener mood, but still thoughtful. The long summer twilight had faded, and she had just put a light to her lamp. At one end of the table lay supper for her brother; at the other the folded sheet of note-paper that Paul had left. She was at present occupied with some sewing, but

on the table beside her lay an open book which had only recently been put down there. It was '*Jane Eyre*'.

The minutes went slowly in her solitude, despite the activity of her thoughts. Her brother's return had of late grown into an object of pleasure, for he now conversed with such vivacity and interest whilst he was with her that she grudged every moment that he was absent. Hugh had recently developed into a voracious reader, and upon what he read he dilated to his sister. Quite a new spirit was growing up in her.

Her hoarse old clock had struck ten, and her face had begun to brighten.

'Not long now,' she thought, and would pause to listen for his footstep. All was still enough. She drew a shawl around

her shoulders, for, having let out her fire, she felt cold. She touched the hair upon her temple, and again plied her needle.

A touch upon the door again aroused her. It was he. Maisie felt almost the joy to greet a lover, but of a sudden she was chilled. There were double footsteps, and a voice—a voice going like cold steel to her heart. Her eye instantly fell upon Paul's letter, and she leaned forward to hide it. But Rutherford had seen her, and she stood in the awkwardness of a frustrated intention detected.

Hugh sat down to supper in ill-humour, as angry against himself as against his visitor. He ought to have foreseen this, and spared his sister the annoyance. He had not seen Maisie's blunder over the

letter, hence attributed her discomposure merely to Rutherford's unexpected appearance.

As a diversion, he picked up an argumentative thread which they had dropped upon their arrival, despite the other's obvious disinclination for it.

'Personal abuse is simply useless and contemptible. If those are your methods, you'll only land yourself in jail.'

'It's truth, at any rate, whatever you may say about it,' was the reply, the speaker's eye being just removed from the face of Maisie.

'I dinna believe it is truth ; but, if it were, what the deuce has it got to do with the matter ? It's politics you've got to fight about, not men's characters. If you want to upset a' men that are no exactly like the run o' the apostles, how do you

mean to carry on the work of the world, whether in politics or any other airt? Pick 'em out, man, and who will you leave? Yoursel', perhaps, and me, but you'll be mair nor doubtfu' about me. Did you ever read that bit o' Robbie Burns' to the "Unco Guid"? Did you no? Then read it when you get home, and speak nae mair about "your neebour's faults and folly." You'll get no good by it, for it's ower easy to get the hose turned upon your ain heads.'

Her brother's voice and presence seemed to inspirit Maisie, and she grew rapidly bolder to the critical gazes of her unacceptable admirer. She had been debating a point of conscience since the beginning of her supper, and the disposal of it also helped to embolden her. A good share of native stubbornness was gaining ground

within her, and she resented what seemed like an attempted silent tyranny from this man. Nothing should be hidden, if only from this resolve of self-assertion. Why should she hide it? Because *he* disliked Mr. Whinstone. Suddenly this became the strongest incentive to its exposure.

At a pause Maisie looked at her brother.

‘Did you read the note, Hugh?’

Rutherford was alert on the instant.

‘No,’ he replied, feeling in his pocket. ‘It’s only about these meetings, I suppose?’

‘I think so. But Mr. Whinstone called hoping to see you before you went to Windyhaugh.’

‘Mr. Whinstone, Mr. Whinstone,’ muttered George, with a renewed glare of

vexation. ‘It’s aye Mr. Whinstone wi’ the whole lot of you.’

Hugh frowned, and read the letter.

‘What wrong have they done to you?’ asked Maisie, resentfully.

‘What wrong have they no done, and are they no doing every day o’ their lives? You ken it nicely, Maisie, my lass, so dinna *you* pretend that you’ve a liking for ’em.’

He seemed to glance eagerly at her for a reply. Maisie easily fell into the trap.

‘Indeed, I ken nothing but good about ’em,’ she asserted, fearlessly, and with anger. ‘It’s no they that do the wrong, but *yourself*. You hate them because they are richer and more respectable than you are, and that’s just the whole truth o’ the matter.’

Rutherford bit his lip, and was silent. Hugh's eyes were upon him. From Maisie's lips, in the accents which perhaps alone had anything like power over him, the sting was more biting than they imagined. It seemed to mark the turning-point of the discussion, and the visitor spoke but few words after it.

The girl's retort had been a natural one, and was given without any previous reflection. After the words were uttered, and the effect of them upon the hearer obvious, she would readily, out of mere good-nature, have recalled them. Knowing what she now did of him, she saw how much deeper was the stab than she had ever intended it to be. But the expression of his face demanded stubbornness, and she said no more.

Directly they rose from the table,

Rutherford departed. He only muttered something to them as he left, and then plunged sullenly into the gloom without, for his long lonely walk over the moors.

'I'm sorry if I said too much,' said Maisie to her brother.

'Ne'er heed him, lass. It's quite true. But, Maisie, he has got the devil of a temper.'

CHAPTER VIII.

PROSPECTS.

FOR a week ensuing, the man Rutherford did not attend any political meeting,— nevertheless, the popular cause did not seem markedly to languish in his absence. It was remarkable what unusual activity there was amongst the hills. The fight was to be a desperate one, although, in view of Mr. Elliott Whinstone's personal disadvantages, few of the better-informed could feel much doubt as to the issue of it. Nobody cared for Mr. Whinstone per-

sonally ; there was, in fact, much dissatisfaction in the ranks of his own party upon the point of his being permitted to stand for the seat at all. It was well-known amongst them that only a conservative of exceptional personal recommendations, such as the late member, Sir Robert Selby, for instance, could have any serious prospect of successfully combating the liberal principles of the sternly practical northerners.

There was to be a final week of feverish excitement and activity. The leading workers knew not sleep, or indeed physical and mental quiescence of any sort. What with addressing, canvassing, and otherwise manipulating the electoral element over a very wide, mountainous district, the marvel seemed that merely human tissue could stand the inordinate strain put upon it.

It seemed like the resuscitation of an old border raid, under a more innocent dispensation. Those engaged were seldom out of the saddle. If they were, it was but to fasten the panting steed at the door of a cottage, or school-room, or mansion ; to gesticulate a few hortatory or denunciatory epithets ; and to spur again for a similar restless interval into the next village or valley.

None were more eager in the fray than Mr. Paul Whinstone and his trusty henchman, Winlaw. In the week which had elapsed, this latter had achieved notable distinction. Not only his unbounded muscular vigour, but a most apparent and infectious enthusiasm, coupled with its necessary counterpart in force of speech, and a marked aptitude for organization, had immediately brought him to the

notice of his commanders. Success had not unnaturally served as an incentive to increased effort, and the youth who had passed his life as a moody, discontented shepherd was himself amazed at the boundless ability which he found so instantly developed.

What was chiefly noticeable to the more discerning of the gentlemen temporarily his associates, was the man's refined and intellectual standpoint. It was not mere inflammatory clap-trap of a temporary and meretricious kind in which he indulged; but exposition of philosophical and far-reaching principles, in no manner enunciated consciously as such, but merely discernible as the motive of the smallest of his topics, as though the natural outcome of some inherent nobility in the man.

At one meeting, the main one of the campaign, at which several notabilities were present, Hugh experienced an incident which impressed him more than anything else in all the engagement was to do. An ex-cabinet-minister of renown in the land, nor that confined to the limits of polities alone, was the speaker of the evening, and to his address Winlaw listened with marked attention and admiration. It had been arranged, with an eye, no doubt, to political strategy, that Hugh himself should have an opportunity of speaking, and as usual he sat with the elect upon the platform. He was nervous in the presence of such an assembly, but as the proceedings progressed the sensation was lessened. He was seen to jot down a few notes upon paper, but otherwise he appeared unusually stolid. Paul,

who sat beside him, watched his movements with singular interest ; to say truth, the young squire was rather envious of his henchman, and was anxious, if possible, to get the clue as to how he did it. Thus the speeches went on.

When Hugh at length rose to his feet and stepped forward, all those eager eyes fixed critically upon him, he felt quite exceptionally incapable. For such situation doubtless his feelings were not unique. It was only his own voice that re-assured him, and, once afloat, he sailed steadily onward. He had intended but the shortest of speeches, only the applause seemed to stimulate him to continue. He cast his eye over that mass of upturned faces to an imaginary horizon beyond, and talked as he had of late oftentimes talked to the sea of barren heath from the soli-

tude of a mountain cairn. An ideal glory of the world lay before him, a field of hope refined and golden enterprise, and he pressed it with animation upon his hearers. So artfully was it interwoven with practicalities that the people perceived not that he was preaching. His spirit was aglow with the artistic soul of the universe, and every triviality that he brought near to it seemed transfigured by the dazzling ray. Life became ennobled by it to a realm of infinite grandeur, and all, by some imaginative miracle, made not inharmonious with a present-day political party.

But he heard the warning whisper of restraint, and had now announced his intention of concluding.

‘Go on; go on,’ came in encouraging tones from the speaker of the evening.

Hugh turned for a moment towards him and bowed. For a short time longer he continued.

It was felt that Hugh had risen to the occasion, and his speech was much in discussion amongst all who were there assembled. The shepherd himself was extinguished, and, immediately the meeting was over, showed anxiety to escape. He was already departing when Paul caught him by the arm.

‘Mr. —— wants to speak to you.’

Hugh turned, and advanced to where the right honourable gentleman was standing. The shepherd was greeted with kindness, and heartily congratulated. Hugh could only answer him in monosyllables; his uneasiness was obvious.

‘Well, good-night, Mr. Winlaw,’ said the gentleman, extending his hand to him.

'I shall hear of you again, but most likely not in politics.'

Hugh looked for a moment in his face, pressed his hand, and then took his departure.

This incident made a deep impression upon Hugh, and he pursued his course with zeal. Nobody was more surprised, and at the same time delighted, than Paul Whinstone. Since his boyhood he had been especially partial to Hugh, and that he should now turn out to be something different from the general run of border-shepherds, Paul, by some obscure method, turned into a source of congratulation to himself. He felt a kind of property in this animal which was commanding such universal attention. Perhaps it was something akin to the pride felt by a leader of

a bear. He at least claimed and received much of the credit due for introducing him to the public. Consequently, he attached himself to Hugh, and was his constant companion in all these political engagements.

The Sunday previous to the last few days' activity, Hugh claimed for repose and recuperation of exhausted vitality, mental and physical. On the Saturday night before it, Mr. Whinstone, with Paul and Hugh in his company, rode towards Feldom Hall from a canvassing expedition in the hills. Winlaw, who, amongst other favours, had received the loan of a fine horse for the better carrying on of his labours, left them at the corner of the great plantation, and father and son continued their journey to the village. Since bidding Hugh good-night, neither had

spoken ; but, upon passing the gate at the Peel, Mr. Whinstone checked his pace until Paul was beside him.

‘ You rather favour your neighbours here, Paul.’

‘ Yes, they are very nice people,’ replied Paul ; it was moonlight, so that he might turn crimson if he desired without the slightest fear of observation.

‘ It was singular that I should have been so much struck by Mrs. Monk’s voice the other night, for it does not seem to be a voice of common tone.’

‘ I always think her voice striking, and exactly appropriate to her.’

‘ H’m. How appropriate ? Is her appearance uncommon ?’

‘ It seems to me so.’

‘ Try your hand at describing her, will you ?’

Paul did so to the best of his ability.

‘Interesting,’ commented his father.

The electioneering activity had extracted a small concession to geniality from him, and he conversed occasionally upon other than political topics with his son.

‘Does she attend church?’

‘Generally.’

The next day Mr. Whinstone took his place in the family pew at morning and evening service. As they came out in the morning, Paul introduced his father to Miss Langtoft, who, as it chanced, had been to church alone, and they walked as far as the Peel together. Clare was vivacious, and Mr. Whinstone was favourably impressed by her.

‘Nice girl, Paul, apparently,’ he said, after they had left her.

'So I think,' he replied, laughing; and no more was said about her.

In the evening Mr. Whinstone spoke to his wife about giving a dinner-party as soon as the polling was over; it seemed to be the right thing, and he must return to town as soon as possible. Conversation ensued upon the names of those to be invited; in the list Mrs. Monk and her niece were naturally included. Notwithstanding this, Paul seemed to hear the discussion languidly, and could only with difficulty be got to take part in it.

During the afternoon of that same day, Mrs. Monk and Clare had been talking. The latter had regarded her introduction to the mythical Mr. Whinstone as something of an incident, and she spoke freely about it.

‘He seems rational enough,’ Clare said of him. ‘I wish you had been there, Mignonne, for you have a knack of seeing through people. I can’t believe that ridiculous story about Margaret.’

‘“Put not your trust in princes nor in any son of man,”’ exclaimed her aunt, playfully.

‘But only a lunatic could turn his own child out of his house, aunt ; and this man cannot be a lunatic. I don’t believe rumour has any particle of the truth of this matter. Do you?’

‘Bless you, child, how should I know what people will or will not do, when I look at the world around me? I should not like to say how any creature would act at any possible juncture of life, least of all myself, so how can I form an opinion?’

Why don't you sound Mrs. Whinstone, if you are so very curious about the affairs of your neighbours.'

'That is such a very feasible course,' replied Clare, with sarcasm. 'But I do consider this a legitimate subject of curiosity. It involves points of the greatest psychological interest.'

'So does every question which the washerwoman puts to the huckster about the baker's wife.'

'Yes, I suppose it does,' laughed Clare.

Nevertheless, Clare continued to speculate upon this topic. With a view, it is to be feared, to further study of Mr. Whinstone's appearance, she went to church again in the evening. The gentleman was present. So were Hugh Winlaw and his sister.

It was not part of Clare's intention, however, to walk home with Mr. Whinstone again, so she sat long in her pew, and when all had gone she walked towards the harmonium, where the schoolmaster, who played it, lingered, and she spoke to him of the music. In a minute or two Mr. Crook joined them from the vestry, and for a little time they conversed together.

Without, it was a glorious evening ; the sun sinking to the hills, a blaze of living gold, and throwing its last rays aslant through the open western doorway of the church. Standing in the pathway was Paul Whinstone, engaged in conversation with Hugh. Maisie was two or three paces distant, looking at a gravestone. Presently they separated, and Paul returned towards the church door. The three within were now also approaching

it, and, as Clare saw the lingering figure appear before her in the full glare of the sunlight, she bit her lip with vexation. Maisie Winlaw, who was passing through the gateway into the road, happened to look back, and she saw them all coming from the church door together.

At the vicarage gate Clare made another effort.

‘Won’t you walk on with us, Mr. Crook?’ she said, as the clergyman was bidding them adieu.

Mr. Crook, never famous for obtuseness, would be excused, and Clare’s last hope had left her.

Left to her own resources, Miss Langtoft entered into a vivacious conversation with Paul upon the progress of the election. In truth, she was angry with him for having, as she thought, so rudely way-

laid her, after her conclusive attitude a short time ago ; but Paul would never have suspected it. He was blind to all except the delight of being near to her. The time favoured his humour, and each moment intensified it. As they passed between the pine woods the cushat was calling from the depths of them, and there was an incessant drowsy hum of the flies up in the branches. Paul flagrantly disregarded his companion's dry discourses.

'Take two, Taffy ;
Take *two* coos, Taffy ;
Take *two* coos, Taffy ;
Take——'

He followed the talk of the wood-pigeons audibly, in this local interpretation of it.

Clare smiled in spite of herself. Paul was dying to make some really poetical remark, but an uncomfortable self-consci-

ousness restrained him. He felt that it would destroy all if he courted ridicule at the outset. When he found himself in a dilemma of this sort, he generally cleared the horns altogether, and took an uncompromising course of his own. So in this instance.

‘Miss Langtoft, you will recall the word “never,”’ he said, with some abruptness. ‘You will give me some time to look forward to, however far away. Something to hope, to live, and to work for.’

He was playing with a dry fir cone which he had picked up from the road some minutes ago.

Clare felt quite calm and self-possessed on this occasion, and she smiled at the blinding selfishness of human affection. How naturally he asked her to wait until

she was an old woman, just to give him the first chance of refusing her !

‘ I will not believe, Mr. Whinstone, that you require anything to work for, besides the sense of your own personal dignity. If that is not stimulus sufficient, I am quite assured that nothing else will supply it.’

‘ That is rather unkind. Nothing in oneself can be so strong as the influence supplied by another,—when it is an influence, I mean, of such an irresistible and —and divine nature as that which you could give me.’

‘ No, it is not unkind. That is exactly what I do not wish to be ; but, at the same time, I do wish to be unmistakably understood. This subject must be for ever dropped between us, Mr. Whinstone. If you follow what you must know to be

your proper course, you will devote yourself to some definite, active pursuit, whether by way of academic study or otherwise, and in five years you will come to thank me for my unkindness, as you now call it, and upon your knees for having saved you from a rash and unwise engagement.'

Clare was very serious: rather hoped, perhaps, that she *could* mildly offend him.

'I do not ask it to be an engagement—'

'Mr. Whinstone, I have given a definite answer; very definite and very final. I do not wish to feel that your grand country here is closed to me, which I shall be obliged to do if we do not agree upon this conclusion.'

This step was no doubt a desperate one,—Clare took it deliberately. All the more so because they were quickly approaching

their point of separation, and she was resolved upon an understanding this time. It was effectual.

Paul said no more, but by the gate bade her farewell politely.

‘Clare, do not flirt with that poor fellow,’ exclaimed her aunt, in a tone more curt than Clare had ever known her use to her before. She was hurt, and a little surprised.

‘He does not consider it flirting,’ she replied, coldly; and left the room to take off her things.

CHAPTER IX.

PAUL PLAYS TRUANT.

THE next day Hugh found Paul's enthusiasm to be much abated. It was impossible that they could succeed, he said; so why distress themselves with all this unnatural exertion?

Hugh only laughed.

'Do you not enjoy it, Mr. Paul, just for the excitement of it?'

'No, indeed, I don't.'

'I could ride till my horse dropped,' replied Hugh. 'I do not think whether

we shall succeed or no. That is a small thing.'

'I can't make you out.'

And the young squire sank again into his moody reverie. He was, in fact, at that moment wondering whether she would care for him more if he could speak like this uneducated fellow beside him—if he could see in these wretched, desolate hills, and their gloomy, uninteresting details, the ridiculous fancies that this shepherd appeared to find in them. But he would not demean himself by attempting it. Let her take her way; the loss was mostly hers. She might have called those blessed places that she likes so much her own,—but—Paul could be proud too when he liked to be. After all, she had saved him, too, from those infernal books,—he could never have done it if she had taken him

at his word. Let her take her way.

'I shall go back to lunch, Hugh,' he announced, a minute or two later. 'I shall be ill if I knock about any longer. You can do without me, can't you ?'

'I shall have to, if you wish to go back, sir; but, of course, it's you that will do the good with them, not I.'

'Then they'll have to be hanged.'

This resolve had come to Paul by way of his friend Alan Kidland. When this gentleman's services had been requested for the district over which he might be expected to have some paternal influence, he had made a very similar response, —there was only one word in it, indeed, of any material difference. For the last minute or two Paul had been thinking of him, and he now saw that he was unquestionably in the right. He had more sense

than to be bored to death by any such humbug. Only once had the friends met since these active operations began, and Paul did not forget the rallying look which Kidland had given him. At this moment it appeared to him, and was irresistible. This afternoon, at any rate, he would rest. For some time he had promised Margaret that he would go with her; to-day he would do it. Alan would cheer him.

Margaret was overjoyed at the sight of her brother back to luncheon. These were evil days for her. In fact, the greater part of this particular morning she had spent in her own room, engaged in the edifying pursuit of scribbling on half-sheets of note-paper two or three imaginary names; writing them and re-writing in every conceivable manner, ringing as many changes upon them as ever College

Youths extracted from a peal of bells. There was Mrs. Kidland, Kidland Castle, Northumberland ; Mrs. Alan Kidland ; Alan ; Walter ; Sir Walter ; Sir Walter Selby ; Lady Selby ; LADY SELBY (skillfully printed in large capitals) ; then in immediate juxtaposition Mrs. Kidland, Lady Selby, and this would require a pause. Then again Mrs. Margaret, Lady Margaret ; Kidland Castle, Grasslees ; and so on and so on for two mortal hours by the clock.

Almost the first words she addressed to Paul on his arrival were,

‘ How is poor Sir Robert Selby ? ’

The question, coming thus abruptly, seemed curious to Paul, and he laughed.

‘ What things you women are ! What on earth should make you think of him ? ’

'This election, of course,' replied Margaret, promptly. 'You men are such hard-hearted creatures. You are thinking and working all day long to get possession of his place; but of him, poor man, very likely dying, you never once think. You have not heard how he is, I suppose?'

'They don't think he can possibly recover. It is only the matter of two or three months.'

'Poor Sir Robert! I think I ought to drive over to ask how he is to-day. Don't you, Paul?'

Margaret was very obedient to her brother in matters of etiquette. She never took a step without consulting him, and she always carried out to the letter the instructions that he very readily gave her.

'Not to-day, Meg. I had thought of

something you will like better. Let us drive over to Kidland.'

'Oh, capital!' cried she. 'You are awfully good, Paul;' and she went forward and kissed him.

It took more than an hour to drive to Kidland Castle, even in a landau and an excellent pair of horses, so that they started immediately after luncheon. Margaret was all vivacity, but Paul as he lay back on the cushions looked miserable enough. His sister rallied him upon his appearance.

'You have been doing too much, poor boy. I hate these elections. Mr. Kidland is the only wise man amongst you.'

'You're right, there, Margaret; but that's not all. I'm in the dumps. She has refused me.'

The young lady simply gaped in the blankest amazement. That anybody extant in the shape of woman's flesh should be capable of such incredible fatuity, to say nothing of audacity, as to refuse an offer from her brother was a fact which had at no time ever so remotely suggested itself to her imagination. If he could not choose a wife, indeed, what could the world matrimonial be coming to? They might be telling her next that she could not make a choice of a husband! But it could not possibly have got quite to this. Would not she half do it herself? Anybody would like to tease him, just to hear him plead more desperately for her favour. How beautifully he would do it! Her face gradually softened to a smile.

' You silly boy !' she said, bashfully : ' that's all you know about women.'

'It is enough,' replied Paul.

'Do you think we shall pop into your mouth like cherries? I should ha—if refuse a man at his first offer.'

'Perhaps you would; but she did it more than half.'

'Now tell us what she said to you, and I'll bet I shall see through it in a minute.'

'I can't remember all she said. It was a lecture at least a yard long; but I do know it ended with the word *never*. What do you see through it?'

Margaret began to look more serious. That certainly was the wrong word, and one that she, at any rate, would not have thought of using. It was just possible: she was *such* a——

'I have asked her twice, but I'll not do it again.'

‘Twice !’

‘She refused me in the library that night, and again yesterday as we came home from church.’

‘Then I am very glad,’ said Margaret, almost from between her teeth. ‘Let the thing go, Paul. I never did like her. Just what I should have expected from such a proud—conceited—stuck-up—’

Margaret stopped for lack of epithets, which would be at once forcible and polite. At length, under her breath, came that last refuge of a woman’s scorn,—‘creature !’ and she lapsed into indignant silence.

In spite of himself Paul laughed, not without heartiness, and for the rest of the drive he was decidedly better.

When they reached the Castle, to the consternation of both, nobody was at home. Margaret was in despair ; Paul apparently

angry with his footman for daring to give him such a report. He himself shouted from the carriage to the butler in the doorway,

‘Isn’t Mr. Alan at home, Beattie?’

‘No, sir,’ replied the functionary, politely stepping forward. ‘He went out an hour since with his dogs.’

‘Hang the dogs!’ said Paul, whilst Margaret handed their cards for the ladies.

This would serve well enough for them; neither of the visitors had wished for anything else; but Alan, the comforter! Margaret could easily have cried. With surly disappointment Paul bade the coachman drive away.

They were trotting briskly down the drive, regardless of anything about them,

—of the grand old border mansion surrounded by its trees, of the mountains and the crags which rose against the sky behind it, even of a distant yelping, as it seemed, of dogs, which travelled fitfully on the breeze. Paul was spelling and re-spelling that ridiculous word ‘ never,’ until it was assuming an incomprehensible aspect in his eyes. An odd, unfamiliar jingle it seemed, of no more significance to him than so many letters of Arabic. Margaret was revolving Mrs. Kidland—Lady Selby with equally perplexing iteration. At length she started up, and threw down her sunshade to her knees.

‘ That *is* dogs, Paul ! Listen !’ she exclaimed.

‘ By Jove ! it *is*,’ he cried. ‘ Stop, Scott !’

And he stared wildly around.

'There he is,' said Margaret, with breathless excitement : she had stood up to look about her. 'He has seen us. He is coming.' Both she and Paul jumped out of the carriage.

At some distance, now behind the trees, now in the open, appeared a figure running towards them. Around it was a group of dogs, barking and yelping in every known canine key, and trying to keep pace with their leader. The visitors laughed ecstatically as they were walking over the grass towards him, and Alan was apparently in the same elevated condition. He waved his hand occasionally as he came onwards, and Margaret took out her handkerchief to respond to him.

It was a warm afternoon, so that when Kidland came up to them he was heated,

despite the cool appearance of his garments. He was clad in thin, grey ample knickerbockers, a snow-white waistcoat, and blue alpaca jacket. In his hand was a dog-whip, wherewith he speedily silenced his clamouring companions. The meeting was a radiant one, the visitors' exhilaration being heightened by the rebound from the depression of their recent disappointment.

‘Come canvassing, old man?’ said Alan, with that humorous twinkle which was the joy of life to Margaret. ‘Here are voters for you!’ he went on, looking lovingly at his dogs. ‘More sense than half your voters, Paul, I’ll bet,—canvassers and candidates, too, for a matter of that,’ in an undertone to Margaret. ‘But aren’t they beauties, Miss Whinstone? Aren’t they, really? I’m awfully fond of dogs.’

‘And I should think they are fond of

you, Mr. Kidland,' suggested Margaret.

'They are, honour bright. I heard a row in the house the other morning, just as I was coming down to breakfast, and, do you know, I found that it was the little terrier b——, hem! that little fox-terrier,' said Mr. Kidland, correcting himself abruptly, and pointing to the animal in question; 'and, do you know, she'd come up from the kennels and had got into the house somehow, and, it's a fact, she was making straight for my bed-room door, although she'd never been in the house before. Astonishing how they know, isn't it? Flossie calls them nasty, savage, oh, I don't know what; but they're not, you know.'

'I'm sure they are not,' asserted Margaret, strenuously. 'I like dogs more than anything.'

'I am so glad of that,' replied Alan, ingenuously. 'I thought you would. And —and, to tell you the truth, Miss Whinstone, I've got my eye on that King Charles there for you. Would you take him from me? Would you, though?'

'Oh, Mr. Kidland, it is too kind of you! I can't tell you how delighted I should be with it.'

'No, no, not at all. Would you like to have a look at the new kennels, Paul? You haven't seen them since they were begun, have you? They are on awfully good principles, really.'

And thus the conversation flowed, as they walked off to inspect Mr. Kidland's latest undertaking, accompanied by the miscellaneous bevy of dogs.

The gentleman was noticeably playful with Margaret, as he always was. They

had a stile to cross on the way, and this is a well recognized opportunity for diversion. Alan did not mean to miss it.

He himself scorned any of the mechanical aids for surmounting it, and took it in an easy leap. Paul did the like, and walked a few paces on.

' You'll not f—shirk it, Miss Whinstone, will you?' cried Kidland, facetiously. ' No, no, come now. Try, do! I promise to catch you if you *should* find that top bar a foot or two too high. I will indeed.'

' Thank you,' said Margaret, proceeding to step up in the orthodox way.

' Well now, wait, do! Give me your two hands. There. Now, step on to the first bar, now the top. Capital! Wait a minute. Wait till I count one, two, three. One——'

Margaret was balancing at full height

on the top bar ; Kidland holding her two hands, one in each of his—holding them very tightly too, she thought—and looking up ardently into her face.

‘No, no, that’s wrong. Let me begin again. Now, one—keep hold of my hands —two—three ! Neatly done, Miss Whinstone, really. You only came down on my toe, but that doesn’t matter. Only a pleasure, really. Oh, nothing,’ he continued, limping at every step, and screwing up his features as though suffering excruciating torture. ‘It’s only one joint. Amputation, for your sake, is better than I deserve.’

‘What am I to believe ?’ said Margaret, in perplexity, looking at him with mingled concern and amusement. ‘Did I really ? I didn’t think I was anywhere near your foot.’

‘There’s only one remedy. The old Romans, wasn’t it? An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. A finger for a toe is only fair, at this rate, isn’t it? Say you’ll give me a finger; only one. Please!’

‘Whatever do you mean? I’ll give you a thumb, if you like; it’s worth two fingers.’

She stuck out the gloved thumb of her left hand playfully, and he clutched it—not the thumb, but the whole hand.

‘That’s the toe!’ he cried, singling out the third finger. ‘A fact; it is. Nothing else will do.’

Margaret, who had, up to that, been really ignorant of his meaning, suddenly perceived it as he let the tips of his fingers play round the lower joint of that

particular one of hers, where the ring would be, and she blushed deeply and snatched away her hand.

‘Oh, Mr. Kidland, you are too bad !’

Paul, who could see before him where the building was in progress, was sauntering steadily on.

‘I’m not so very bad, am I, Miss Whinstone ? Even my dogs like me, you know, but nobody else does.’

‘That’s a story, I’m sure. You must have no end of friends. Paul is very fond of you.’

Mr. Kidland shrugged his shoulders. . .

‘Are you ?’

‘Of course I am, in a way,’ laughed she. ‘You are such good company. But you are a dreadful tease.’

‘I only tease people I am awfully fond

of. That King Charles, now. I tease him by the hour. He's the best friend I have in the world ; aren't you, Tuesday ?'

The dog, having caught his master's eye, had perceived that he was being talked about, and consequently had come nearer to take part in the conversation.

' Do you call him Tuesday ?' asked Margaret, in surprise.

' Yes, haven't I ever told you ? I call my dogs by the names of the days, and when I get through those I begin with the months. I've got to March.'

' What a good idea ! But I'm sure you ought not to give him to me if you are so fond of him.'

Margaret had quickly caught up the pronoun in speaking of the dogs. Mr. Kidland would as soon have called his father or his sister *it* as one of his dogs.

'Oughtn't, Miss Whinstone?' he replied, looking into her face. 'I wouldn't give you anything that I didn't think a lot of. I wouldn't, really.'

He said this in rather a different tone from any he had used before, but, as they were getting inconveniently near to the kennels, he pursued the topic no further.

'Thank you, Mr. Kidland,' said the young lady, with a kind, but timid glance at him in return, and then she blushed with gladness.

Paul perceived that his sister was inordinately excited as they returned home-wards, but, as she volunteered him no information, he was too delicate to seek for any. He judged, at any rate, that all was going well. It would have been difficult for him not to have perceived the

growing kindness of his friend Alan for his sister. He had perceived it, and nothing pleased him better. Few men had better prospects than Mr. Alan Kidland, of Kidland Castle, and to think that his recovered sister might some day be the mistress of that desirable mansion was a genuine delight to him.

The thought of this enabled Paul to enter more thoroughly into Margaret's prattle on the return journey, to the exclusion of his own peculiar sources of annoyance. Now that the expedition was accomplished, however, he was occasionally nudged by a mild feeling of reproach at having left Hugh to work those hills alone. He hinted it once to Margaret, but failed to evoke her sympathy.

'Don't bother about that now, Paul, pray,' she said. 'His back is stronger

than yours, and let him do the work. What else has he to do? It's his place to work for you, of course.'

'That may be, but you won't get many shepherds to do what he is doing for us, even if they could.'

'You all seem crazy about him,' returned Margaret, petulantly. 'I read a speech of his in the *Border Gazette* on Saturday, and I'm sure I couldn't see much in it.'

'You should hear him, though. I know he makes me feel a lazy beggar sometimes.'

'Don't talk nonsense! Do you suppose it's your place to work? You know how to look after your estate, what more do you want? You can fish and shoot as well as anybody on the border, I know that—Mr. Kidland says that, and he can judge, at any rate. Don't be so morbid,

Paul! I believe Mr. Kidland is the only really sensible man amongst you.'

'I believe you are right, Meg.'

'But, look there, isn't that the girl from Braidstruther, Winlaw's sister?'

'Where?' said Paul, with unexpected interest. 'So it is!'

They were just approaching their own village, and Maisie was on the road before them evidently making in the same direction. She turned round to look as she heard the carriage rolling on behind her. Paul kept his eye upon her all the time, and nodded kindly to her as they passed.

'They must get used to walking, I should think,' said Margaret, facetiously, changing her position on the cushions.

'I expect so,' Paul replied, absently. 'Poor girl, she must be awfully lonely, now Hugh's away so much.'

'Oh, they don't feel it. Perhaps the vicar goes up to keep her company.'

'Don't be so sarcastic, Margaret. I really won't have it. Why on earth you should dislike the girl so much, I can't imagine. She's as nice a girl as you can meet anywhere.'

'I know you'll stick up for her, sir. But I don't exactly dislike her if she'll keep her place.'

A really angry reply rose to her brother's lips, but he checked it.

'Well, don't let us talk about them. But let me tell you, my girl, that, if you want to live comfortably in the north-country, you'll have to change your ideas about these things. They're not a bit different from what we are, and, if we all did our duty as well, the world would get on a good deal better.'

'I read that in a radical speech in the paper,' said Margaret.

But she had so far aroused the anger of her brother that he refused to answer.

CHAPTER X.

CURRENTS.

ON her return from the village shop, Maisie called at the Peel for the paper. Clare was in the garden at the time with a magazine in her hand, and, seeing the visitor enter the side gate, she walked across the lawn to intercept her.

'I expected you this evening, Maisie; I don't know why. Are you walking home alone? Then I will go a little way with you. Come up to the house first. I am all alone. My aunt went to London this morning.'

Miss Langtoft felt a singular pleasure in the arrival of this country girl. Not many hours ago she had received a visit from some ladies of position who resided at a country seat some miles away, but she had felt their presence weary her. Maisie, as a plainer morsel, proved more palatable to the young lady's present particular form of hunger. There were times when Clare thus desired a taste of 'the thing itself,' as distinguished from her ordinary courses of sophisticated dainties.

They went into the house together, and turned into the dining-room. Clare then rang for tea.

'I should think you will be glad when this election excitement is over, won't you?'

'I shall, Miss Langtoft.'

'At any rate, it has given your brother

his opportunity of doing wonders. Aren't you proud of him ?'

' I always was,' replied Maisie, simply. ' He could always do anything he laid his hand to.'

' Then this is no surprise to you ?'

' Not exactly a surprise. Certainly I didn't think he would be brave enough to do it so soon ; and I am sure he wouldn't, if you had not been so kind to him.'

' Why, how do you mean, Maisie ?' asked Clare, looking rather intently into her companion's face.

' You and Mrs. Monk helped him so much by giving him the books, Miss Langtoft.'

' Oh, very little !' laughed Clare. ' He hasn't got much out of books.'

' He doesn't get exactly the thoughts and words out of books, but they seem to

give him strength. He often calls them wine,' added Maisie, with a smile.

Clare continued to show the greatest interest in the young woman's naïve disclosures.

' Does he ?'

' And they excite him like wine sometimes. That night he brought the last lot from you he was walking about all night. He never went to bed at all. And I heard him go out before it was daylight.'

Maisie liked to talk about her brother, and to nobody more than to these friends at the Peel, who she felt could understand him so well. Her pride in him was all the greater because *they* could take an interest in him.

' Don't tell me all his secrets,' said Clare, with a laugh, ' or you will make me feel impertinent.'

'I am sure he would not mind my telling you, Miss Langtoft.'

When they had finished tea they went out into the garden, and walked round to look at the flowers. Here and there Clare picked some as they stopped to talk about them, until at length she had a goodly nosegay, which she handed to her companion.

Then they passed out of the gateway to the road.

Through the still pine-wood they went,—still and silent utterly, save for the drowsy humming of the flies and an occasional summer twitter of a bird. It was a close evening, and the sky was now overclouded to a sullen grey,—not a breath of wind to make even the fir-trees whisper. Clare had led on Maisie to talk of her old life at Southernknowe, of her

parents, and of her ancestors, and both narrator and listener had grown much interested in the subject. They passed through the top gateway to the open heather above the wood, the black Dour Crags crowning the ridge immediately before them. Clare stopped for a minute as though about to return, but ultimately she walked on slowly with her companion, talking or listening to Maisie talk, her eyes turned downwards to the path noting the sprinkling of white sand on the dark peat mould and the myriads of winged ants which the heated atmosphere had brought out on to the surface.

Maisie was experiencing intense enjoyment. She had always felt rather afraid of this imposing young lady, diffident in conversing with her, impressed with her own ignorance and simplicity ; but to-day

she was free from all this. Miss Langtoft, she thought, seemed so natural, so affable, that it was impossible to feel uneasy with her ; difficult to be sensible of anything save the refinement and the personal charm peculiar to her.

Still they climbed, having reached now the broken ground where great fragments of black rock lay scattered about, which rendered the path a rough and difficult one.

Clare again spoke of returning.

‘ But I must go to the Lough,’ she said, ‘ now I have come so far.’ And forward they went again.

They stood by the side of the largest crag, a huge solid boulder at least thirty feet high, and looked at the smooth round holes on the slanting side of it made by the feet of enterprising climbers desirous

of scaling it. From a glance at the vale behind them, in colourless gloom, they turned towards the desolate tarn, lying grim and placid in its dark basin of rock, forsaken even of the wild-fowl that flitted recently about it, and there, by the edge of the black water, standing motionless, they beheld a solitary horseman.

‘It is Hugh,’ said Maisie, looking into Miss Langtoft’s face.

‘I think it is,’ added her companion.
‘I must go on and speak to him.’

‘I don’t think he has seen us.’

But in this Maisie was mistaken. Hugh had seen them some minutes ago, and was only awaiting their coming. When he saw that he was perceived, he dismounted and led his horse forward to meet them. He had not seen Miss Langtoft to speak with her since winning his renown, and he

was surprised to find with what diffidence he approached her.

'You are a bird we did not expect to find here, Mr. Winlaw,' said Clare, vivaciously, offering her hand to him.

'And to me, Miss Langtoft, you are equally unexpected.'

Hugh's thought had been otherwise worded, but he altered it.

'You are like a warrior returning from victory. You make a most picturesque subject here, and if Mr. Crook was at hand I should request him to sketch you. May I add our humble congratulations to those which you have received from more influential quarters. Your success is a great pleasure to us.'

'Not so great as to me to hear you say it, Miss Langtoft,' replied Hugh, with easy politeness.

Clare did not intend her use of the plural pronoun to imply any claim to regal distinction, although to a stranger it might very naturally have suggested it.

‘Are you going to win?’

Hugh smiled and shook his head.

‘I cannot think it.’

‘Fie for shaine! Who ever goes to battle with the thought of being defeated?’

Hugh shrugged his shoulders.

‘It would be quite possible for me to do so, Miss Langtoft.’

He was not looking at her, so Clare allowed her eyes to glance at his face, for a moment only.

‘Instinctively you are impelled to regard the wide truth of a thing, is that it? But you are enthusiastic. Does not enthusiasm blind one to the mists on the horizon?’

'Not me, I am afraid.'

'How philosophical you are becoming, Mr. Winlaw,' said Clare, jocosely. 'Isn't he, Maisie?'

Hugh patted his horse's neck, and only laughed. Maisie was not sure that she followed the thread of the discussion, so she laughed too.

'But I must return now,' continued the young lady. 'I am very glad that I happened to see you. Add to your laurels. If there is any book that you want, my aunt will feel it a kindness if you let her know. You really understand this, Mr. Winlaw?'

'I am sure I do, Miss Langtoft,' replied Hugh, emphatically.

They bade farewell, and parted.

Clare proceeded slowly on her way, for it was uncomfortably hot. When she got

beyond the crag she rested, sat down upon one of the blocks of stone with which the ground was covered and gazed at the gloomy prospect before her. She was not one that suffered much from the fashionable melancholy. Her nerves were distinctly healthy, and she looked abroad on life with a very perceptible sense of pleasure. Vacuous she was not, hence she had her moments of reflection ; but of late she had been conscious of a slight alteration in the density of such moments. They were not so easily dissipated by the very first ray of sun. The orb had sometimes to exercise considerable persistency in his efforts to disperse the mists. Such was certainly the case this evening.

Clare was angry with Mr. Paul Whinstone,—the poor, innocently, loving Paul. It was as if one had placed some delicate

and fragile vessel directly in her path with the knowledge that she could not step but break it; and Clare had a positive horror of breaking anything. The fellow had loved her, honourably and in sincerity she fully believed, and had compelled her to fling his love ruthlessly from her. She was intensely angry with him for doing this. Nothing would have given her soul greater contentment than the ability to hug his love passionately to her, to devour it, to live on it; but nature had kindly given her the power—the pre-
vision rather I may call it—to perceive her inability without exacting suffering from her in return. He was comely, generous, rich, and not contemptible; but these appeased not her hunger. They would crumble away to dust in the white palm of her hand, directly she closed it

upon them. She was perfectly aware of it, so that she must fling them from her palm for ever. She wanted more than these: and he, the culprit, had thrust home to her the knowledge of her requirements. She was angry with him for the service.

Slowly Clare descended, lingering in the shadow of the pine-trees, but gathering no comfort from them. During the evening she tried to read, but could not; tried to play, but it irked her. When in the ten o'clock darkness she looked forth from the open window on the obscure world without, and heard the rain dancing upon the parched and thirsty leaves in the garden, her own soul found comfort and refreshment, and cheerfully she sought forgetfulness in repose.

'Did she say so, my lass? Ha, ha!' laughed Hugh, as he walked beside his sister, leading his horse by the bridle. 'Was there nothing else? Are you sure, nothing at all? Tell me every word.'

'Nothing, that I can remember. She seemed so interested in all I said about you.'

'Bless her! She is a queen,' cried Hugh, joyously. 'I have dreamed of such a woman, but I never saw such a one as she. What the world might be, Maisie, if we could have a good sprinkling of them!'

'Oh, yes, how different it might be!' echoed his sister.

'Let us thank our stars that this one has come in our way. And we shall keep her too, my lass,' continued Hugh, exultantly, 'for I have my suspicions. Mr.

Paul has got some eyes. I should like well to see him get her, and for us to have her mistress here at the Hall. I would be a shepherd all my days, so that I might be *her* shepherd.'

Hugh waxed enthusiastic in his praise of Clare, and his sister heard contentedly. In such converse the way seemed short enough; and the gloom, and the solitude, and the adverse world were all as nothing to them then. All Hugh's weariness had left him, and as he went about his bucolic duties on the moor his imagination was restlessly active. Constantly he was jotting down in a little note-book from his pocket odds and ends of the most multifarious description. Thoughts for possible speeches; names of electors to be canvassed; prices of sheep at a certain market. Despite his inordinate hunger, he had

insisted upon fetching and milking the cow for his sister. Of everything did he feel capable, from the highest to the most trivial of callings.

When Maisie had taken the fragrant, foaming pail from his hands, he sat down with alacrity to the meal which she had prepared for him. His enthusiasm did not affect his appetite; at least, not in the way of impairing it; and for some time he was silent. The flowers which Maisie had brought back with her were in water upon the table, and Hugh's eyes frequently rested upon them. He knew but little of garden flowers, and was certainly ignorant till now that flowers of such indescribable beauty as these from the garden at the Peel had survived the abandonment of Eden. They were a feast unto him in

themselves, and a source of irrepressible ecstasy.

‘Did Miss Langtoft pick them for you herself, my lass?’ asked Hugh.

He had asked the same question before. Maisie laughed, and repeated her answer.

Immediately Hugh had finished his meal, he went to attend to his toilet, and presently he re-appeared radiant and robust. The table was now clear, and, producing a parcel from a corner, he placed it where recently had been his viands. Untying the string, he disclosed to his sister’s view, who was watching with curiosity his movements, a bundle of political pamphlets. These were to constitute dessert, and he resolutely sat down to try the flavour of them. A glance at one or two of them sufficed to allay Maisie’s curiosity, and Hugh continued his task in silence.

He was still engaged with them when his sister had retired to rest. Hearing the expected rain, he rose from his chair and went to look into the night. He dallied for a few minutes with the thought of the countless millions of drops which were falling over those dark and silent hills—tracing one from its source in those obscure, inscrutable clouds to a stone on the lonely summit of the Corbie's Cairn, a grim journey through the chaotic darkness which prevailed. Oh, the sense of loneliness and the unknown which encircled the thought! He turned inwards and shut the door.

His eyes blinked at the strong light of the lamp, and ultimately rested on the bunch of flowers beside it. The solitude was dispelled. He took up the glass, and turned it round in his hand, examining

every single blossom of the number. A victorious smile lit up the whole of his features. For a long time he gazed, knowing nothing of darkness or solitude. Every flower spoke to him—every flower was a face to him.

Before he sat down to resume his work he took out two blossoms, and placed them carefully between the pages of his pocket-book.

'May they make me worthy to serve her!' he muttered, playfully. 'I have dreamed of such a woman, but there cannot exist another.'

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.





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